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Novel

6



The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent



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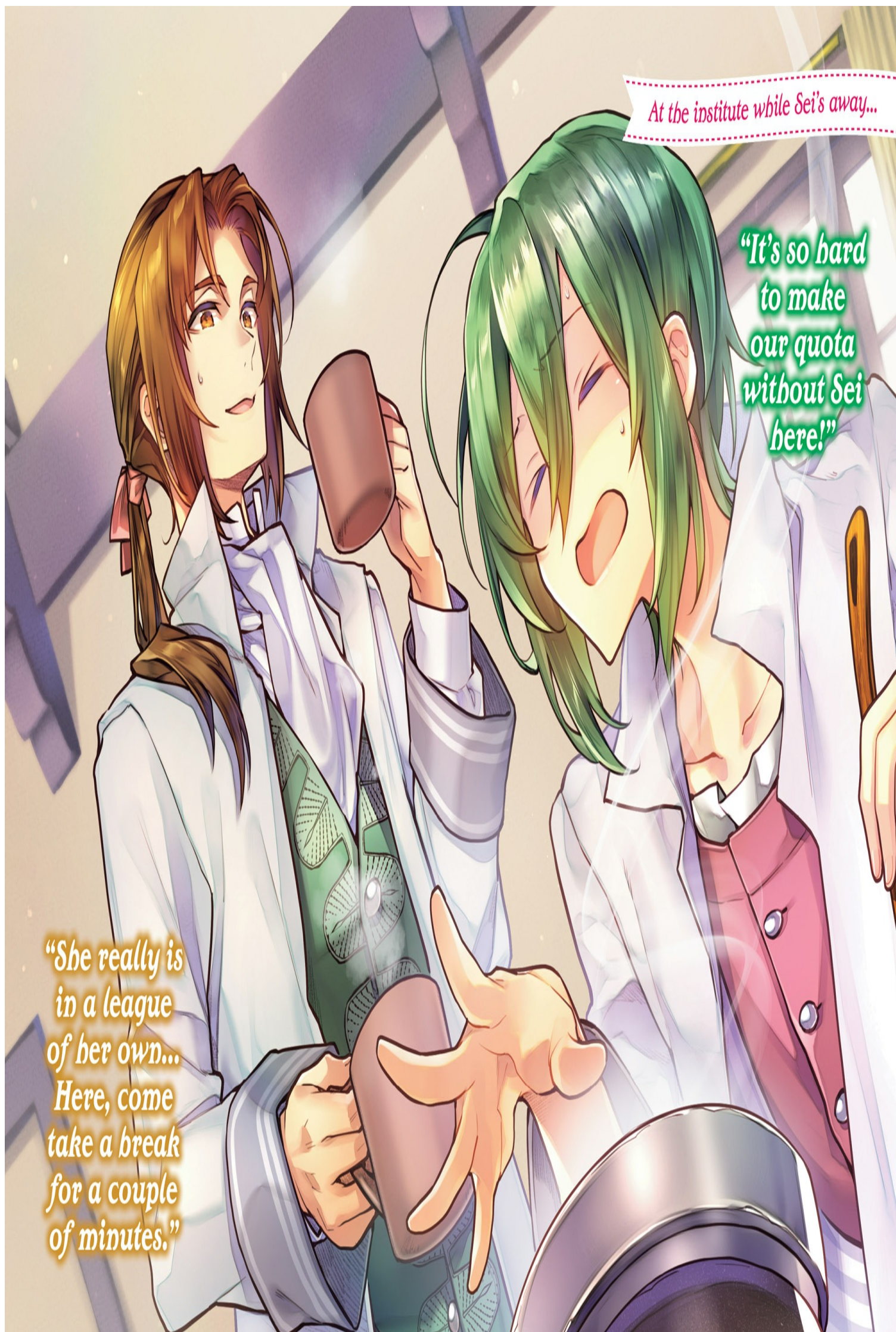
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At the institute while Sei's away...

*"It's so hard
to make
our quota
without Sei
here!"*

*"She really is
in a league
of her own...
Here, come
take a break
for a couple
of minutes."*





Meanwhile, Sei's enjoying her time off!

"It's so lovely
to see you in
a different
sort of dress
than usual."

"I'm always
wearing the same
outfits while at
the institute, so
I thought it'd be
nice to try out
something new
for once!"

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WRITTEN BY
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Seven Seas Entertainment



Johan Valdec

The head researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. Keeps an eye on and takes care of Sei. Friends with Albert since childhood.



Yuri Drewes

Grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly. His only interest is in research related to magic and magical powers. Has taken a keen interest in Sei.



Jude

A researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora and in charge of teaching Sei. Caring and friendly. Frequently comes to snatch the food Sei makes.



Aira

Aira Misono, a high schooler who was summoned to another world like Sei. Studying magic at the Royal Magi Assembly.



Elizabeth Ashley

The daughter of a marquis whom Sei befriended at the library. Looks up to Sei.



Erhart Hawke

Magus of the Royal Magi Assembly and Albert's older brother. A man of few words who has common sense. Always being manipulated by Yuri.

Characters

*The Saint's Magic Power
is Omnipotent*



Sei

Sei Takanashi, an office lady who was summoned to another world to be the Saint. She's been healing people and purging monsters, and recently has been troubled by the fact that all over the place, people have begun to worship her. Enjoys cooking and making cosmetics.



Leonhardt

The leader of the mercenary company in Klausner's Domain. He takes a liking to Sei for her great skill as an alchemist.



Albert Hawke

Knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order. Known as the "Ice Knight" for his supposedly frigid demeanor, but toward Sei, he's...?



The moment she got home from working overtime at the office, Sei Takanashi, an office lady in her twenties, was abruptly summoned to another world. Although Sei was summoned to be the Saint, the crown prince of the kingdom exited the room with only Aira Misono, the cute high school girl who had been summoned with Sei, leaving Sei behind.

Sei had no notion of how to return to Japan, so she soon decided to begin working at the palace's Research Institute of Medicinal Flora.

Although Sei realized that she was indeed the Saint, she concealed the truth in order to live her life as an ordinary person. However, Sei displayed tremendous magical ability, astounding everyone with her skills in potion-making, cooking, and concocting cosmetics.

Starting from the day she used one of her high-grade HP potions to save Knight Commander Albert Hawke's life, Sei performed one miracle after another. In time, rumor in the palace began to suggest that Sei Takanashi was the true Saint.





Although she was summoned by the Royal Magi Assembly to be the Saint, Sei managed to avoid being outed for some time. She took up intensive magical training under the guidance of Grand Magus Yuri Drewes, and her days were busy yet fulfilling.

Perhaps as a result of her training, or perhaps by mere coincidence, Sei performed another miracle with her gold-colored magic, strengthening suspicions that she was the Saint. However, Crown Prince Kyle denounced those suspicions, stubbornly upholding Aira as the true Saint.

Nonetheless, on a monster-slaying expedition, Sei once and for all proved her Sainthood. When Knight Commander Albert Hawke was in danger, Sei called on her golden magic to instantly cleanse the black miasma producing the monsters.

As a result, Crown Prince Kyle was confined to his quarters for accusing Sei of being a false Saint. Furthermore, Aira, who had been isolated by Kyle once she arrived in the kingdom, was finally able to make friends at the academy, and with Sei. She, too, now strives for a peaceful life.





Due to the miraculous power of her golden magic, Sei was finally recognized as the true Saint. However, she still couldn't figure out how exactly to consistently call on her Saintly power.

Even so, Sei received a request to visit Klausner's Domain—the alchemist's holy land. She enjoyed the trip at first, where she became the apprentice of a master alchemist, befriended the captain of a mercenary company, and explored the possibilities of medicinal cooking.

Then, while working with her new teacher, Sei came across the memoirs of a previous Saint. Thanks to a hint in the memoirs, Sei finally figured out how to use the Saint's special powers—but the key to calling on them was so embarrassing that she couldn't tell anyone. She had to think about Knight Commander Hawke!

However, now that Sei could use the Saint's power, she could do what she had come to do: go into the forest with the knights and mercenaries, and slay the monsters within.





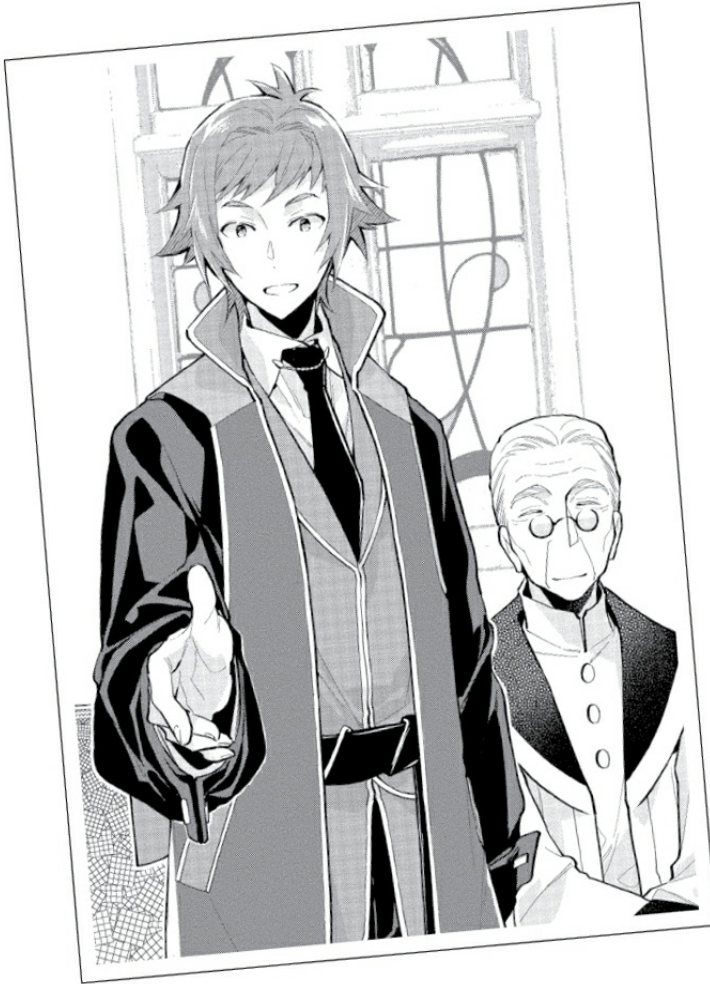
With the help of these powerful reinforcements, Sei successfully purified the forest and brought peace to Klausner's Domain. However, one thing still troubled Sei: the tragic state of the forest devastated by the slimes. In secret, Sei used the power of the Saint to miraculously revive the forest.

During the victory banquet, Sei and Aira helped with the cooking and grew closer with the mercenaries. However, with her Saintly mission now completed, it was time to leave. Though it pained Sei and company to say farewell to their new companions, they couldn't help feeling cheerful as they made their way back to the capital.

Now able to use the Saint's power at will, Sei headed into the forests of Klausner's Domain, where valuable herbs grew in abundance. Though she was protected by the knights and mercenaries, as they proceeded into the forest depths, they encountered slimes—monsters resistant to physical attacks!

They were soon surrounded. After a grueling fight, Sei and her companions managed to escape back to the castle. There, they discussed how to reach the forest's heart, as they lacked the magical firepower to defeat the slimes. Luckily, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes arrived, Aira in tow.





Sei returned to the capital from Klausner's Domain. In gratitude for her work there, she received rare herbs and seeds, which she used to develop new types of skin-care products. The recipes for Sei's skincare products were incredibly popular across the kingdom, and new products flew off the shelves the second they were put on the market. At her friends' suggestion, Sei finally decided to establish her own company. She opened a shop in the capital, run by Oscar and Franz. One day, when she was visiting it, she discovered that coffee existed in her new world!

Interested in what other imported products might be available, Sei started searching for Japanese food. She went to a port city known for trade, hoping that she might find something there. Before her search could begin, she ran across someone in need. The captain of a ship was searching for a mage to heal his injured crewmate. Sei helped him by giving him a potion that she had made, and she hit the jackpot: the foods this crew had brought from their country! Sei was delighted to finally be reunited with rice and miso, which she had sorely missed.



SEIJO NO MARYOKU WA BANNO DESU VOL. 6

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Act 1:

The Guest from Abroad

AFTER MY HIGH SOCIETY DEBUT as the Saint herself, I returned happily to my peaceful life at the research institute. Then, one day, I was summoned to the palace.

I was riding in a carriage in which an official from the palace had arrived at the institute, and beside me was Johan Valdec, the institute's head researcher. Everyone was silent. Perhaps this had to do with the fact that this official wasn't the one we usually dealt with. It was like when you have to ride in an elevator with both an acquaintance and a stranger.

I gazed absentmindedly out the window of the carriage, ruminating over the reason I had been summoned. Surely it had something to do with my role as the Saint. Maybe it was about the tea party and ball invitations Johan and I had been discussing right before the official had showed up.

However, this guy's behavior has been too unusual for that to be the only thing... I mean, if that were the case, why would he need to bring Johan with me?

But then, why else would I possibly be summoned to the palace? My mind churned over possibility after possibility as we made our way to our destination.

Once we reached the palace, we were immediately escorted to the king's office. I exchanged a look with Johan. Normally, we were taken to a different room for meetings with the officials with whom we were familiar. This time, we didn't have even a moment to say anything before we were ushered into a new room—one in which we found both the king and the prime minister waiting for us.

What in the world could this possibly be about? I felt a twinge of anxiety at seeing both of these very important people.

"Thank you for coming. Please have a seat." The prime minister motioned us to sit on one of the sofas.

“Yes, sir.”

Johan and I took our seats as the chamberlain prepared tea for us without a moment’s delay. The delicious smell of the brewing tea leaves wafted through the air, but considering the situation, I didn’t have it in me to look forward to sipping it.

The king and prime minister look calm as usual, but whatever this is about must be a big deal, right? My heart pounded as I wondered what they were going to say.

The king began with small talk. “I would like to thank you for agreeing to go through with your recent debut ceremony, as well as for attending the ball.”

I was in torment. Was I supposed to thank him for inviting me? I couldn’t come up with any other tactful thing to say. So I went ahead and thanked him as well, taking care not to let my pitch rise in such a way that it sounded like a question.

The king smiled stiffly. “Has anyone tried to get in touch with you since then?”

“At present, I have yet to be contacted by anyone I do not already know.”

“That’s good to hear. Please do let us know if anyone bothers you so that we may take care of them.”

“Thank you,” I said. *Huh. That makes it sound like Johan was wrong when he posited that the king was already taking measures to prevent people from contacting me.*

The prime minister then offered a supplementary explanation. Johan had indeed been right after all. The palace really was acting as the main point of contact for the Saint’s social life. All the nobles knew this, so all invitations to me were sent to the palace first.

Incidentally, this was the norm. In the past, some Saints had been born to commoner families. As a result, they hadn’t had anyone to act as their support in high society, so for generations, kings had performed the role of the Saint’s formal guardian.

Since I was someone summoned from another world, were they just

defaulting to the same protocols they undertook for commoner Saints?

The prime minister offered to forward the invitations to the institute if I wanted to sort through them myself from now on, but I politely declined. After all, I had no idea how to judge a person's intentions—and whether I ought to get to know them—from their name alone.

While I had been taking a ton of classes at the palace, I still had a great deal to learn. Not to mention, I had zero interest in getting involved with the politics of high society. All I wanted to do was work at the institute, support myself as much as possible, and when I was called upon, perform the duties that only the Saint could perform.

I told the prime minister as much and requested that they continue to deal with the invitations for me.

But did they really summon me here today just to explain this to me? I wondered as I sipped my tea.

The prime minister had finished his explanation, so now the king spoke again. There was something much tenser about his demeanor, which told me that we were finally about to get to the real reason for our meeting.

"As it turns out, a student from abroad will be coming to our kingdom, and I hoped the research institute would lend us their aid in this matter."

"What do you mean?" Johan asked, a confused look on his face.

Like, let the kid come check out the institute? I thought. Then again, if that was all this was about, there would have been no need for me to be present.

The prime minister followed up with an explanation. The student coming to the kingdom to study was a prince of another country, one that had dealings with Salutania. However, they had never practiced such an exchange with this country before, and moreover, they had received the request only recently. This prince was apparently fascinated with the various cultures and technologies of other countries, and he had studied abroad in other places already. So, while generally speaking he would be studying at the Royal Academy, he had also requested permission to take a tour of some Salutanian research facilities.

The research facilities in the palace were all developing cutting edge

technology, so they housed a great number of things that the Salutanian government wished to keep away from foreign eyes. However, due to this guy being a prince and all—and because they wanted their relationship with this other country to remain amiable—they had decided to let him see what they deemed to be permissible.

That was where the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora came into play: we were among the chosen facilities. We only had to show the prince what we felt we could, just as the other research facilities had been instructed to do.

But, well, then there was the problem of me.

The prince likely knew of the Saint's existence. However, they suspected that he didn't know of my specific abilities or anything. They wanted to conceal my powers as much as possible, so they meant to ensure that I didn't come into contact with the prince.

So, what were we all to do? That was the true purpose for this meeting and my attendance.

The king and prime minister suggested that it would be a good idea for me to stay in the palace for the length of the prince's visit—and moreover, that I shouldn't go to the research institute at all while he was in the kingdom. However, that wasn't realistic. Plus, I had herbs to grow at the institute's gardens, and I wanted to check up on them.

However, I couldn't think up a better solution right off the bat, at least not on my own. I figured it might be better to mull it over some, discuss it with Johan, and try to devise a strategy for navigating this situation together. Johan seemed to have the same idea as well, and we all decided that we would reconvene at a later time.

The meeting was over, but I had a question for the king. "By the way, what country is this prince from?"

"Zaidera."

The name sounded somewhat familiar. A cold sweat slid down my back as I wondered if I was thinking of the right country.

Not long after our meeting at the palace, all the facilities that needed to know about the Zaidaran prince's visit were told of it. They were also informed that the royal family would be inspecting each facility, so everyone was busy getting ready.

The first thing every facility had to do was clean everything from top to bottom. All I could do was chuckle tiredly at the thought.

Of course, we had to do that as well. We were tidying under the pretense that someone of high standing was coming to visit, but really the priority was hiding any documents that we didn't want someone from a foreign royal family to see.

There was indeed confidential information contained in the documents that were scattered all around the institute. We were a leading research facility, after all. To the trained eye, even our minor scribbles could be considered valuable. We couldn't leave such documents in a place where the prince might just casually pick them up to read.

Everyone knew this, and even the people most unmotivated in the organizing and cleaning department were putting their all into tidying.

Jude and I were busily sorting documents when he suddenly asked, "Hey, Sei?"

"Yeah?"

"They said that it's a prince from Zaidera who's coming here, right?"

"That's what I heard."

"Isn't that the same country where that captain we met in Morgenhaven was from?"

Captain Ceyran and his crew were from Zaidera. They had treated us to Zaidaran cuisine, and in return, I had taught them how to make a type of preserved food. It hadn't been too long since we met, but it was already a fond memory.

My thoughts drifted toward the circumstances of my first meeting with Ceyran. He had been looking for a potion to give to a member of his crew, one who had been in an accident. I had wound up giving him a high-grade HP potion

I'd made.

You read that right: one *I'd* made, i.e., a potion afflicted by my fifty-percent-bonus curse. I had no regrets about giving it away, since it had managed to cure the crewman's injuries. However, I was beginning to feel a bit uneasy now that I'd heard that a prince of Zaidera was coming to visit.

I felt guilty about all this for some reason, and I responded as if this had only just occurred to me. "I think you're right, now that you mention it."

Jude squinted at me. "You don't think it's possible that he found out about Ceyran and the potion, do you?"

"Don't even say that."

I'd had the same exact fear during the meeting at the palace.

We didn't yet know for sure whether these events were linked, but the corner in my mind from which creeping thoughts emerged whispered that the likelihood was high.

But we still don't know for sure yet... A cold sweat once more gathered on my back, and I froze.

The sound of Johan's voice snapped me out of it, though. "Why are you just standing there?"

"Oh, sorry."

I assumed he would move on once he saw me go back to cleaning, but he didn't. I looked up curiously to find him wearing an indescribable expression on his face.

"What's this about a potion?" he asked.

"Uh..."

Johan had overheard Jude's ponderings. Not all of them, just one of the most important parts. I glanced at Jude, and he grimaced the grimace of a culprit who'd been caught red-handed.

However, there was no point in trying to lie about it now. I resigned myself to my fate and told Johan everything that had happened in Morgenhaven,

including the events that had led me to become acquainted with the crew of the ship carrying the ingredients I had sought. It wasn't easy to admit it all, but I figured it would be best to come clean to prevent potential problems in the future.

Johan sighed with a weak smile. "I suspect that might have something to do with this visit too."

"So you agree then." I felt bad; it seemed like I was always causing trouble for Johan.

"I'm sure His Majesty assumed the same."

"How would he know?" I asked.

"You had bodyguards with you, remember? No doubt they reported the events that unfolded to the king in full."

"That would make sense."

Both Jude and I nodded.

Our bodyguards had been knights from the Third Order, with whom I was on familiar terms. Despite that, there was no way they wouldn't report this sort of thing to the king. It wasn't like I had specifically ordered them to keep the details of our excursion a secret either.

"Then it probably *would* be best if I'm not here while the prince is visiting," I said.

"We don't know if he's specifically after your potions or not. But he *is* a royal. I'm sure we'll be warned ahead of time when he's planning to come, so all you have to do is be strategically absent on that day."

"That's true."

Based on this conversation, I realized the king and prime minister's recommendation probably was for the best; it would be better if I weren't at the institute when the prince came to observe. While there was a possibility that he wasn't specifically interested in potions like the one I'd given Ceyran—i.e., the potions I specifically made—it was safest not to take any unnecessary risks.

After much thought, I decided that for the time being, I'd move to the palace and commute to the institute. This made for a decent compromise with the king.

Johan was right that there would be prior warning before the prince's arrival. The palace officials were actually drawing up a schedule in advance, determining when the prince would visit each research facility. I would simply come to work on the days when he wouldn't be at the institute.

This arrangement would last only for the period of time during which the prince was studying in Salutania. I had no intention of making this a permanent move, and I planned it so as to mitigate the effects it would have on my work as much as possible. I had no choice but to forsake my research when it came to monster-slaying expeditions, but I hated the thought of letting anything else impact my principal occupation.

It wasn't just that I wanted to watch the progress of the rare herbs I was growing, I swear!

"Good afternoon, Sei."

"Oh, Liz. Good afternoon."

Several days after I had told the palace my plans for the prince's stay, I bumped into Liz in the library. We met for tea at the palace rather frequently, but I felt like it had been a while since the last time we saw one another among the books.

"It's been a while since we ran into each other here," Liz said.

"Yeah." I smiled at her, pleased to hear we were on the same wavelength.

"By the way, have you heard the news?" she asked.

"About what?"

"About the incoming student from Zaidera."

Ah, so she had heard about it now.

According to Liz, since the prince was going to be staying at the Royal

Academy, the student council had been informed of his visit.

“You guys have a student council?” I was surprised to hear that and asked for more details, even though it drew us away from the main subject.

“Yes. It’s basically run by high-ranking nobles from the senior class.”

“I see.”

When she says “basically,” does that mean that, if there’s a royal attending the academy, they become president no matter what year they are? I decided to put this thought aside for the time being and returned to the real topic of interest: the prince.

According to Liz, since their new exchange student was a prince of another country, a member of the royal family would be taking care of him at the academy as well. She was referring to the second prince, Prince Rayne, who was a member of the senior class as well as the president of the student council. The student council handled numerous matters, with Prince Rayne at the lead.

As it so happened, Liz was the vice president. She had to act as the prince’s hands and feet, dealing with all sorts of things. Now she was busy securing a number of arrangements for their new student.

“That sounds like a whole lot of work. I know you’ve got this, though.”

“Oh, thank you. How are things on your end? The prince wishes to visit the research facilities as well, doesn’t he?”

“So it seems. We’re having to get all kinds of things ready in preparation for his visit.” I shrugged wearily, making Liz giggle a little.

At first, I’d thought it would be just tidying the institute and making adjustments to what projects we had in open view, but it had turned out to be a whole lot more than that. Because we were going to have a noble visitor from abroad, we wound up being tasked with other duties, such as repainting the outer walls. Johan decided who would work on what, gave them a budget, and left the people in charge to get it done as fast as they could.

Liz nodded sagely. “As I hear it, it’s about the same everywhere else.”

Even the buildings at the academy were being repaired. Since the academy

was bigger than the institute and the prince was going to be staying there more often than anywhere else, they really had to have their work cut out for them. I empathized with the people laboring away to make everything look just right.

“I wonder what this prince will be like,” Liz mused.

“Probably the serious type? He’s actually coming all the way to another country to study, after all.”

“That would be ideal, if so.”

“Is that not always the case?”

“Well, at times, nobles may find themselves...inconvenienced in their home country. At such times, they might take themselves to other countries for a while, until they deem it safe to return.”

“Ohhh.”

I could totally see that happening. In that case, it was entirely possible that all this talk of studying abroad and wanting to observe other cultures was actually a pretense.

I really hoped he was a genuinely studious kind of guy, though. I feared for what Liz would have to deal with if he wasn’t. He might not even get along with her, let alone Prince Rayne.

More than anything, I prayed Liz and her peers were able to establish a good relationship with the prince while he was here.

The days grew warmer, and it was very nearly summer when the Zaidaran prince arrived with his entourage. Although he was the one studying abroad, he wasn’t the only one who came. Whenever a person of high position traveled, it was customary for them to bring attendants, so it was a rather large group.

Later, I heard from a maid that the capital had been all abuzz during the procession of Zaidaran carriages. There had been much revelry to celebrate the arrival of a noble visitor from abroad.

Having traveled such a long way, the prince and his retinue were to rest for the evening and have an audience with the king the following day. As I held a

social status equal to the king's, I was expected to attend this audience as well.

There had been a great deal of back and forth in the days leading up to this event, with people debating whether they should hide my existence or show me off for sake of formality. In the end, they determined that the people of Zaidera probably knew of me and decided to go with the latter. I would attend only the first and final audiences, however, and I was assured that all I had to do was stand there looking Saintly.

I had no problem with that, since it meant that I wouldn't have to attend the ball they would be holding in the prince's honor that evening. Having a guest from abroad really was a big deal; they needed to hold a special event to commemorate it.

Some of the palace's staff definitely wanted me to attend the ball as well, but I planned to politely decline. I felt a bit nervous doing so, but that anxiety ended up being a waste of energy on my part. It turned out that I didn't even need to turn anyone down—the prime minister had done that for me.

Good job, Prime Minister!

Now I had to contend with the audience itself. It was being held in a public location, so I had to arrive at the palace early in the morning to get all dressed up, just like I had for my debut. My maids were the ones who dolled me up, so I just had to do as they said.

I decided to wear the same robe I'd worn for my debut ceremony. Nobles liked to have new clothes commissioned for every event, and given this precedent, those in the palace were delightedly anticipating what new robes I might show off for my next function. However, as a born commoner, that felt like a waste to me, so after an exhausting debate, I managed to turn down the offer.

My maids frowned at the idea of recycling the same outfit, but I got them to compromise by agreeing to change up my accessories. The biggest change was the addition of a white veil. Although I would be in attendance as the Saint, the higher-ups didn't want the prince to see my face, so they had suggested I wear it. It was an exceptional item, made of elaborately knitted lace, so it entirely hid my features when I wore it. The bottom was embroidered with myriad gems so

it wouldn't fly up even if the wind blew.

These gems actually held a secret within them: they were enchanted with a magic that made it difficult to tell the color of my hair and shape of my features through the gaps in the lace.

As it turned out, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes had enchanted them himself, and with great care. No one had ever thought of devising this kind of enchantment before, so he had gleefully embarked on the project once he got the general gist. Normally, they would have had to conduct some investigation to ascertain what element of magic was necessary for this kind of enchantment, but as Yuri was able to use all elements, he wasn't hampered by such complications.

Incidentally, after it was completed, I heard that it had been made using Dark Magic.

The veil sounded really useful and all, but its one weakness was that it was difficult to see through on my side as well. Therefore, I needed someone to escort me to the venue.

I was pretty much ready, so I had some tea that my maid Mary had made while I waited until it was time. It wasn't long before a knock sounded at the door.

The maid standing next to the door received the visitor and told me that my escort had arrived. "Knight Commander Hawke of the Knights of the Third Order here to see you, my lady."

"Thank you. Please let him in."

I was only a little surprised to hear it was him. I had assumed that they would send a knight from the First or Second Order, like they had for my debut. I had been a bit nervous about having to hold the arm of someone I didn't know, so I was just a little elated by this development.

Albert came into the room wearing a much more striking uniform than he typically wore. This event probably demanded the extra mile in terms of decorum. Combined with his noble bearing, it felt like he was two times more sparkly than usual.

He greeted and complimented me like he always did. For once, I was able to

handle it. As of late, I had started to become accustomed to compliments. I was also able to wear a smile that didn't look forced as I thanked him.

Thank you, Lady's Day lessons!

I mentally did a victory pose in recognition of what a good job I had done—but perhaps I shouldn't have let my guard down.

It was finally time to go, so I donned my veil.

One of the maids, who was in her late teens, gave me a delighted smile. "You look like a bride."

Indeed, I was wearing all white as well as a veil. I really was the image of a bride. ...And that's why it was a mistake to look Albert's way when I nodded in agreement.

At first, we just stared at one another in astonishment. However, Albert's expression soon softened, and a gentle smile spread across his lips. I...had a bad feeling about this. I could tell from the look on his face that he was planning something.

That was when he struck. "Then that would make me the groom, yes?"

I took a moment to think this over. *I'm the one wearing white. That makes me the bride? And...he's the groom? Wh-what did he just say again?*

These wild thoughts whirled in my mind, leaving it all fuzzy static.

Reflecting on the moment now, I should have just said something exasperated like "Yeah, right." I bet I would have too, if it had been anyone else. But this was Albert we were talking about here.

I felt my cheeks grow hotter and hotter, and I kept coming up blank in terms of responses.

Albert smiled even more sweetly, seemingly satisfied that his plan had worked, based on my reaction.



I got the feeling that the maids were letting out a mute, soundless scream.

“Sei?”

I felt entirely overpowered as Albert leaned in to take a closer look at my expression. My shoulders shook against my volition.

Is he expecting me to say something now?! I was caught in quite the predicament—my response had already been far too delayed.

As someone with zero experience in romance, I had no idea how to react in this kind of situation.

Mary, apparently unable to watch this situation continue, came to my rescue. “Forgive me, but it’s about time to go.”

“Ah, you’re right. Let us be off then.” Albert looked a bit disappointed, but he smoothly nodded at Mary’s words.

“Y-yes.” I sighed with relief as I placed my hand on Albert’s outstretched palm.

I gave a slight bow to Mary to express my gratitude, at which her eyes softened.

After we got out to the hallway, Albert switched into work mode and didn’t try to tease me any further than he had. He now wore a nearly blank expression and had a stiff look about him.

This was a secret, but my heart skipped a beat to spy him wearing such a stoic expression; I normally didn’t get to see him like that.

We arrived at the venue and found that many people were already present. I followed Albert’s lead to the spot we were told to stand. It was near the platform where the king would be positioned—in other words, the seat of honor. However, we didn’t go up on the platform but rather stayed a level below it. Based on my social status, this was theoretically unacceptable, but I really didn’t want to stand out too much, so the officials had allowed it.

At first, they had planned to have me stand on the platform with the king and prime minister. But I had insisted, since all we had to do today was make the prince aware that I was in attendance. Truthfully, I had hoped to be in the

crowd with the other ministers, but they had immediately shot down that idea.

Having arrived at my designated position, Albert stepped away from my side for the time being. Being a knight commander, he was to stand with his peers. Nevertheless, we weren't too far away from one another.

After a bit of waiting, the master of ceremonies announced the entrance of the guests from Zaidera. The doors opened and the prince entered, followed by his retinue. The person walking in the lead was no doubt the prince himself.

For some reason, a murmur ran through pockets of the crowd as he entered. I didn't understand why until he got closer. I couldn't really make out his features through the veil, but I could tell the color of his hair.

In Morgenhaven, the Zaidेरans I had met had mostly had black or dark brown hair. In this regard, the prince was the same. I had also heard that he was sixteen years old and that his name was Ten'yuu. He was the son of the emperor's seventh concubine and the eighteenth imperial prince.

As one might imagine from hearing the word "concubine," Zaidera practiced polygamy. Therefore, their royal family consisted of many more imperial princes and princesses than that of the Kingdom of Salutania.

Prince Ten'yuu wasn't very tall, compared to the people of Salutania. However, judging from the other people accompanying him, he was probably of average height. He did seem a bit thinner than his compatriots, though.

That didn't matter so much. What really stood out to me were the large, round glasses he wore. At a glance, I would have assumed he was one of the researchers in his retinue instead of the actual prince. I imagined this was the reason I had heard the crowd whispering.



The high-ranking nobles around me didn't react at all, which didn't surprise me in the least. While this was unexpected, Prince Ten'yuu did seem to truly be the serious type, based on his appearance.

The prince delivered a proper greeting to the king during the audience. He seemed quite composed for someone his age.

I hoped that Liz and her peers at the Royal Academy would be able to get along with him. I really, truly hoped so.

And so, the audience came to an end without any problems. Once the prince and his retinue left, we made our way out of the hall as well.

There was to be a banquet later that night, but I wouldn't be attending. If all went according to plan, the next time I saw Prince Ten'yuu would be during his farewell audience with the king.

Now all I had to do was hide and not be found.

Act 2:

The Imperial Prince

A WEEK AFTER Prince Ten'yu's arrival. I was at the palace for my lessons and caught snippets of what people were saying about him. I paid more attention than usual; typically, I didn't really care about gossip, but I wanted to know why exactly the prince had elected to come to the kingdom.

People said more or less the same things across the board. I supposed he had only been here for a week. Thus far, he had remained on palace grounds or the Royal Academy campus. He hadn't yet gone to visit any of the research facilities, but those tours were scheduled to start sometime later.

So, naturally, everyone mostly gossiped about what he was doing in the palace. My main source of information was a maid who attended me. All of the things she had to say about the prince were generally positive.

According to her, he was quite the courteous gentleman, especially given that he was a royal. Even the knights who were acting as his bodyguards had a good opinion of him.

In any case, I was at the palace to attend one of my customary tea parties. The only other attendee would be Liz. Unfortunately, Aira wouldn't be joining us that day, since she had work and her own lectures to attend.

It had grown hot enough that you could get sweaty even when you weren't directly in the sun. Thus, our tea party was being held in a breezy square gazebo in the palace gardens. The palace chefs had done their best to prepare a ton of snacks with refreshing flavors to help us feel a little cooler. There were madeleines made with more lemons than usual, mousse flavored with citrus fruits, and even gelatin desserts accented with lemongrass. They were served together with herbal rather than black tea, which was unusual when it came to the palace.

"I must admit, I was surprised when I heard that they were serving sweets made with herbs. But the flavor is quite refreshing and simply perfect for this

weather,” Liz said.

“Yeah, I’m really impressed with the offerings. They’ve done a superb job of bringing out the flavors.”

“Oh? Do you mean to say that you weren’t the one who devised these sweets?”

“Nope. The chefs came up with the recipe on their own.”

A lot of people assumed that I was involved whenever there was a new dish flavored in such a way. However, as of late, other people had been throwing their hats in the “now you’re cooking with herbs” ring.

A palace chef had come up with the recipe for the gelatin dessert as well. The way I heard it, after seeing the meals served at the research institute’s dining hall, he had wanted to see how he could implement herbs in his own work.

And Liz was right. This chef’s concoction tasted far more delicious than anything I could make. The way professional chefs could obtain new ingredients and whip up new kinds of delicious foods...they really knew their stuff! Perhaps it wouldn’t be long before the day when I could once more enjoy the kinds of sweets that had been available back in Japan.

“And this tea. Is it made with mint? It’s so refreshing,” I said.

“I heard that it’s made with a few other ingredients as well. I wonder what the exact blend is. I would love to have this served at home.”

Perhaps the blend was one of the maids’ homemade recipes? It really did taste wonderful, so I wanted the recipe as well. I would have to ask the maids later.

Liz and I were chatting over tea, but this was actually part of my lessons. This tea party was sanctioned not only by my etiquette teacher but my tutor in politics and economics.

Which is to say, it was just a tea party, but it was also more than that. Someone had once said that tea parties are a battleground for ladies. The topics we discussed often had to do with politics and the like, which was probably why my tutor had approved the activity.

As a result, I got to meet Liz for tea parties not just during my etiquette lessons but during other class times as well, meaning I got to see Liz more often in general.

Incidentally, Liz was the one who had negotiated with my politics tutor. While that teacher had a gentle disposition, he was quite strict with his lessons. The fact that Liz had been able to secure his permission really spoke to Liz's capabilities as a negotiator—her position as the fiancée of the crown prince notwithstanding.

Liz had said that if we were going to hold these parties, then it would be most effective to learn all kinds of things. I supposed that this way, she intended to kill two birds with one stone.

That being said, after exchanging our opinions about the tea and sweets, our conversation switched to one more appropriate for my education, i.e., the matter of Prince Ten'yuu.

"So, I believe that Prince Ten'yuu is presently at the Royal Academy?" I asked.

"Yes, that's correct."

I had been informed of Prince Ten'yuu's plans for the day so that I wouldn't run into him. This week, the first place the prince had gone to was the Royal Academy. Apparently, he was prioritizing getting to know everyone his age.

"What's he like? He seemed a diligent sort when I saw him during the audience."

I had heard that Liz and the other members of the student council were helping him at the academy. While the maids had a good opinion of the prince, there was a chance that he showed a different side of himself to his classmates. Furthermore, I had a feeling that Liz was exceptionally good at reading people and noticing things that others didn't, which was why I was so interested in her opinion.

"Your first impression of him would be correct."

Even at the academy, he was as serious as he looked, and moreover he was as courteous as the maids had made him out to be. He hadn't done anything that Liz could complain about.

The prince was also taking classes with the other students, so he often discussed what they had learned that day with his classmates. From those conversations, Liz had determined that Prince Ten'yuu was knowledgeable about all sorts of things.

"He must be quite the studious type to have come here to study abroad despite knowing so much already," I said.

"I agree. He said that he had come in order to learn even more. He is particularly interested in plants."

"Plants? Well, that's pretty broad. What kind of plants?"

"All manner. We have discussed flowers, trees, and every other variety. However, I believe he spoke most about edible flora."

Neither of us said it out loud, but Liz seemed to pick up on what I feared, as she swiftly pinpointed the heart of my curiosity.

Prince Ten'yuu was royalty. One could surmise that, based on his apparent knowledge base, he had already received an education befitting a prince. Part of that education involved the conversational skills to subtly gather information from everyone around you without letting others know what it was you really wanted to learn. Therefore, there was more to the prince's discussions than a mere interest in botany.

As Liz had been similarly educated, being the fiancée of a prince, it seemed to her that Prince Ten'yuu was *particularly* interested in plants. Therefore, it stood to reason that that topic had something to do with why he had come to Salutania.

"Edible flora, you say?"

"Fruits, for example, but roots as well. He has even described eating types of plants that don't appear edible, though they actually are."

"Oh, yeah, there are certainly plants like that out there."

"He has also discussed their medicinal uses."

That gave me a bad feeling. "You mean eating roots as a kind of treatment?" I reflexively grimaced, which made Liz giggle.

“That’s right. I don’t know much about it, but I’m sure that if you heard him describe it, you might know precisely what he’s talking about.”

“You’re probably right.”

She was correct in that there were edible plants that could be used to treat certain ills. Had I been there, I might have been able to identify whether any of the plants he mentioned were in fact medicinal. However, I had no way to know for sure.

“This is a list of everything I remember him bringing up.” Liz handed me a note.

“Thank you.” I chuckled dryly as I looked over the list of plant names. These were no doubt the names of plants the prince had previously mentioned. *Good going, Liz.* “I do recognize some of these as medicinal roots, but the list doesn’t seem to lean toward one type over the other.”

“You think so as well?”

“Yeah. However, I can only speak to the ones I know, and I only know how they’re used here in Salutania.”

The list included plants that, in the kingdom, weren’t used for medicine *or* food. However, that didn’t mean that they necessarily used the plants differently in Zaidera. In other words, the prince probably knew his stuff, but it wasn’t totally outside the realm of possibility that he was still an amateur. When I explained this to Liz, she agreed that we couldn’t yet know for certain. Even so...

“I heard that you’re supposed to avoid running into the prince, but perhaps you ought to be far more careful. His tours of the research facilities are to begin soon, after all. He will be visiting the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora as well, yes?”

I hadn’t mentioned that I was supposed to avoid him, but the palace had apparently warned Liz about it. That made sense, given her position as the crown prince’s fiancée as well as the Salutanian individual who was in most frequent contact with Prince Ten’yu. That was also probably partly why she was keeping a close eye on his movements at the academy for me.

“I’m planning to not be there that day. But you’re right, I will be careful. Thanks for your concern.”

Liz smiled in response.

Around the same time we had our tea party, we received word that my order of rice and miso had arrived at my company. It had been brought by a ship that sailed with the fleet with which the prince and his retinue had traveled. I was glad for the news, since I had already used up everything I had bought in Morgenhaven.

Franz had actually bought more ingredients for me than just rice and miso, perhaps because I had shown an interest in a variety of things. He asked me to come by the shop, so I did so early the following day.

“Do you think this is enough? We got more than you purchased last time,” Oscar said as I was taking in the bags of rice piled in the company’s storeroom.

“I think this’ll last me for a little while. We don’t know when the next shipment will be, do we?”

Truthfully, I suspected that we would run out pretty quickly—as it turned out, the grand magus loved rice. In fact, he had liked it so much after that first taste during our experiments that he had come to the institute’s dining hall every time they served it. Considering his enthusiasm for the grain, it wouldn’t have surprised me if, once he learned that we had gotten our order in, he tried to acquire some for himself.

“So even this isn’t enough, huh?” Oscar asked.

“Nope. By the way, Lord Drewes from the Royal Magi Assembly hasn’t reached out to you to make inquiries about rice, has he?”

“Oh, he has, now that you mention it.” In fact, Oscar had been planning to give Yuri any surplus.

Apparently, Yuri had sent his first inquiry to the Zaideran merchant ship, only to learn that they had already sold all their imports. After figuring out that my company was the buyer, he had asked Franz if he could have some. He sure was

tenacious.

“It’s up to you. We’ll say no if you want it all,” Oscar said.

“Hmm. Let me think about it for a moment.”

What *was* I to do? The fact that Yuri had tried to acquire rice on his own meant that he either wanted to eat rice more often...or he wanted to do more research on its effects. I couldn’t come up with any other explanation for why he would want to buy it.

If he merely wanted to eat it more often, then there was no need to give any to him, so long as we increased the frequency with which rice was served at the institute’s dining hall. However, if he wanted to do his own experimenting, then it would be better to give him a share.

I wanted to investigate rice’s effects, but I was busy with my own research projects. If Yuri was up to the task, then I figured it would be more efficient to leave the experimenting in his hands.

Okay. The first thing I need to do is find out just what he’s up to.

“Do you know why Lord Drewes wants rice?” I asked.

“No, we didn’t ask. What would you like to know?”

“Hmm. I’d just like to know what he’s after so we know whether it would be better off in his hands.”

“I see. Then I’ll go ahead and make the inquiry.”

“Thanks, that’d be great, if you could.”

I was quite grateful that Oscar offered to do it, since I had a feeling that there might be problems if I asked Yuri what he planned to use the rice for. Yes, he had made the inquiry at my company—but he didn’t know that it was *my* company.

I wound up learning Yuri’s intended use for the rice the next day, and from the man himself. Apparently, Yuri had figured out the true identity of the rice-buyer the second he received my company’s inquiry. He sent a letter saying that he would negotiate with the buyer of the rice directly, and at the same time, he arrived at the institute to tell me his reasons in person.

Oscar hurried over to the institute as soon as he got the letter, but it went without saying that it was already too late. I appreciated the effort, though.

It was just as I thought. Yuri wanted the rice for research. We had yet to determine if recipes other than chirashizushi induced the same effects, so he wanted to find out for himself. Therefore, I agreed to give him a share of the rice in exchange for the results of his research. Also, we decided that he could ask the dining hall chefs for any of their recipes that used rice.

In any case, other than the rice, there was also the matter of the miso. It had been transported to the kingdom in a barrel. Unlike the rice, I was absolutely sure we had enough miso to last us until the next shipment arrived.

The final things Oscar showed me were the new ingredients we hadn't previously received. At first, I was shocked. Then I was filled with excitement.

Franz had used his own judgment to procure an incredible array of ingredients, all of which I hadn't seen in a very long time. Glutinous rice, adzuki beans, mushrooms, dried fish, even green tea. And genuine soy sauce. You read that right: *soy sauce*.

Franz had thought this might be what I was looking for, since it had a similar smell to miso and was a dark liquid.

I did a fist pump on the spot. I at least managed not to cry out with joy.

Of course, I bought everything he showed me. The price was fearsome, as they were all imported, but I was able to afford it with my personal funds, thanks to how well my skincare products sold. The institute also chipped in, since they purchased a portion of the goods for the dining hall. However, if I was going to keep buying these ingredients regularly, I realized it would probably be better to limit how much I bought each time.

Ideally, I wanted to have a meal with rice once a day, but when I considered how much I could actually afford, it amounted to more like one or two times a week. And there were other people who wanted to have rice too, so a lot of it was used up in any given meal.

"Something the matter?" Franz asked me.

"No, nothing."

We were in his office, and I had sunk into thought as I looked over the list of purchased items. However, I decided it was best not to say what I had been thinking, because I had been mulling over the way the buying price really stacked up when you put everything all together.

By all rights, a company ought to seek profit, but I suspected we had been offered discount prices due to Franz's good work and goodwill. Moreover, it would have been rude to call any of it costly in front of someone who worked for me.

However, Franz seemed to see through me. "It's too expensive, isn't it?"

"Yes... But that can't be helped, what with it being imported."

"Indeed. I negotiated with the seller, and apparently this was the lowest price they could afford to sell at."

If Franz said so, then it had to be true. If we wanted it any cheaper, then we'd have to make it ourselves.

"Do you think we could grow rice?" I wondered out loud.

"Do you know how?" Oscar asked.

"A little bit, but even if we could grow it, we don't have the land."

"Land, huh? That's a good point."

Though I said that, there was a possibility that I could acquire land. I had a feeling that if I asked the king or the prime minister, they would grant it to me. They always said they hadn't repaid me enough for my work as the Saint, despite all of the accommodations I'd already received.

The last time they had offered me land, I had declined on the pretext that I had no idea how to manage it. However, my feelings had changed a bit since then. I mean, owning land where I could plant whatever I wanted had its appeal. Rice wasn't the only thing I wanted to grow, after all. I had a ton of plants I wanted to try my hand at cultivating, starting with all of the herbs I had received from Corinna.

While I already had a garden plot for experimentation at the institute, my investigations were limited by its size. As a matter of fact, it was already way

too small for what I wanted to use it for, as lately I had increased the number of herbs I was researching.

Hmm. Maybe I should discuss this with Johan later. But... I sank into thought again in front of Oscar and Franz, but I didn't at all notice how closely they were watching me.

It had been about half a month since the prince from Zaidera arrived, and we expected that, before long, he would have become so used to life at the academy that he would begin conducting his tours of the research facilities. The first place he visited wasn't the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, but our turn came soon enough.

I spent the day of Prince Ten'yuu's scheduled visit cooped up in the palace. And it wasn't just that day either, but the days before and after as well—all to accommodate for any unforeseen sudden change in schedule. Thanks to these precautions, I didn't meet the prince, and his visit to the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora resolved without incident.

I returned to the institute when I felt it was safe again. ...So I say, but it was really because I wanted to go back to work. Moreover, the Zaidेरans would be staying in Salutania for a while longer, so I couldn't relax yet. However, since the prince's tour was over and done with, I figured it would be okay to go back to the institute, just for a bit.

The day I returned, I checked up on my plot of herbs, which I had been away from for a few days. My plants looked like they were growing well, and it seemed nothing had happened to them in my absence.

I nodded at them in satisfaction as Jude walked over to me. He was there to help me with the watering—and to tell me what had happened while I was gone. He had observed Prince Ten'yuu closely for me, since I couldn't have done it myself.

Jude confirmed that the prince was profoundly knowledgeable about herbs, just as Liz had told me. According to Johan, Prince Ten'yuu knew so much about herbs that if the research institute decided to employ him the very next day, he would have had no trouble getting straight to work. This meant that he had

even greater expertise than he was showing off at the academy.

Naturally, he also knew a great deal about potions.

“He was especially knowledgeable about the ingredients that go into potions that cure status abnormalities,” Jude said.

“That’s amazing.”

Unlike HP and MP potions, there was an unbelievable number of variations in the recipes for status cure potions. For example, a potion to cure poison required an entirely different set of ingredients from a potion to cure paralysis. Consequently, if a person could talk fluently about these potions, that indicated a wealth of knowledge about a wide range of ingredients. The fact that the prince knew all this was impressive in itself.

“He asked us a bunch of questions, but we also learned a lot from him as well.”

“Oh? What kind of questions did he ask?”

“You know, like whether the effects of a given potion can vary if you use different ingredients—or if it was made in a different country. Or if potions that have the same widely accepted name might actually have different effects.”

“I see.”

This seemed to reflect Liz’s earlier description. Prince Ten’yuu was in fact studying abroad because he was particularly interested in learning about the differences between countries. Jude nodded in agreement when I told him as much.

We finished watering my plants while we were chatting, so we were heading over to Jude’s plants when he suddenly mumbled, “Although, Johan had this troubled look on his face.”

“He did?”

“He really did. After the prince left, I asked him about it, and he said he was worried about *why* the prince was asking those questions.”

I realized that the prince must have asked many more questions other than the ones that Jude remembered most clearly. But for now, all the evidence I

had to think through were the ones that had left an impression on Jude.

It sounded like Prince Ten'yuu was simply interested in the differences between each country, but was there more to it? And if so, just what kind of information was he trying to eke out of these discussions?

"Differences. Differences..."

"What are you thinking over there?"

"Hmm, wait, I think I'm on the verge of remembering something... I got it!" As I searched my memories, I recalled that I had once wondered the same thing. Specifically, I'd had that thought while I was trying to figure out what it was that made my potions more effective than the ones made by others. Yet again, a cold sweat collected on my back. "Do you remember asking similar questions, way back when?"

"Did we do that?"

"You know, when we discovered that my potions are different from other people's."

"Oh, yeah!" Jude's eyes opened wide, and he smacked his fist into his palm. However, then his face went pale, as if something had occurred to him.

I had a feeling that it was the same thing I had realized.

"You don't think that Johan was thinking about..."

"You too?"

"Yup."

The potion I had given to Ceyran back in Morgenhaven.

When you considered Ceyran's connection to Zaidera, it only made sense. I might have been unconsciously refusing to connect the obvious dots. Part of me felt guilty for having given Ceyran one of the potions I made purely for my own self-satisfaction. I had been devoted to thinking that the possibility the prince had come to Salutania because of that potion was very low.

I had a feeling that had been my bad habit of wishful thinking all over again.

"But how could Prince Ten'yuu have found out about the potion?" I asked.

“Hmm, maybe he heard about it from a rumor?”

“If Ceyran and his crew thought it was a high-grade HP potion, then surely it wouldn’t have been worthy of the rumor mill.”

“I dunno about that. High-grade HP potions aren’t all that common outside the institute. And hey, maybe the crew just talked about the incredible potion that saved their friend.”

Jude had a point. But I still had a feeling that this kind of rumor wouldn’t have been enough to inspire a prince to come all the way here. Did that mean the prince was here for a different reason after all?

As we were thinking it over, footsteps approached from behind us. Jude turned, and I peeked around him—only to find Prince Ten’yuu standing there, a single attendant with him, his mouth slightly open.



For a moment, we stood there in turn, just gaping at one another. I recovered myself and quickly dipped into a curtsy. Jude immediately followed suit with a bow. Since I wasn't meeting the prince as the Saint, I figured it wasn't inappropriate to behave like his status surpassed mine.

"Are you one of the researchers at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora?" Prince Ten'yuu asked.

Jude hesitated for a moment before answering. "Yes. It is an honor that Your Highness remembers me."

Prince Ten'yuu must have spent time close to Jude during his tour, if he remembers his face so well. There's no way he could remember the faces of everyone he met that day, right? Either way, Jude sure knows how to treat a noble. I bet he learned all those manners at the Royal Academy.

I couldn't help but let my thoughts drift off like that while I tried to escape from my reality. I mean, the very person I had been trying to avoid was standing right in front of me.

I had dropped my gaze to the ground, so I couldn't see Prince Ten'yuu's expression. I had a feeling that he was looking at me, though. My feeling was probably right too, based on the next thing he said.

"Are you one of the researchers as well?" he asked after a moment.

Uhhh, what should I say? I had been trying not to run into this guy, and I hadn't talked to him the one time we were in the same room together. I wished someone would answer for me, but unfortunately, no one did. Even Jude looked like he didn't know what to say.

It would have been rude to make him wait much longer, so I reluctantly nodded. "Yes, Your Highness. My name is Sei, and I am employed here at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora."

"I am Ten'yuu, and I've come here from Zaidera. I remember meeting Jude here yesterday, but I believe I did not meet you, yes?"

"That is correct. I was away working at another location."

At first, I had considered just saying I was a passerby, but I quickly realized

that was a bad idea. Not just anyone could walk the grounds of the palace. Plus, if I couldn't tell the lie persuasively enough, there would surely be consequences down the road. In any case, I knew I wasn't good at telling convincing lies, meaning it was best to be honest from the start. Saying I was a researcher was harmless enough.

But I had a feeling that was my wishful thinking acting up again. However, I dedicated myself to ignoring the feeling.

"I see. Are you the one growing these herbs?" the prince asked me.

"Yes, that's right."

"You're cultivating quite a few rare varieties. Just as I would expect to see at a research institute."

Even though I'd assumed my physical features would be more intriguing, the prince's eyes were focused on the herbs at my feet. He was looking at the herbs I had grown from some of the seeds I received from Klausner's Domain. It was a species that was relatively easy to grow, but which wasn't native to the area around the capital.

Had he registered that much from a mere glance? If he had, then everyone was right. He really did know a lot about herbs.

As if to prove that was true, he started asking me questions about the other herbs growing in my plot—questions that someone who wasn't an expert wouldn't have known to ask. I couldn't help but get really into our conversation, so much so that I didn't even notice how much time was passing.

"Your Highness, we should be going soon," his attendant said.

"Is it that time already? I got so absorbed in conversing about these rare varieties that I hardly noticed. Thank you for answering my questions," the prince said.

"Please, don't mention it. I apologize for detaining you for so long," I responded.

Prince Ten'yuu headed back to the road he had been on before. Some of the tension in my shoulders bled away—I hadn't even realized it was there—as we

watched him walk farther and farther away.

I let out a breath and heard Jude do the same. I looked up at him, and we both smiled awkwardly.

Well, it was now fact that I had met the prince. There was no changing that.

I should probably tell Johan about this. I wonder what he's going to say? The thought of having to report this incident bummed me out, but I had a feeling that Johan was going to be more troubled than even I was feeling. *I'll just have to give my sincere apology...*

Behind the Scenes

THE ROYAL COUNCIL convened once a month. The participants were the king, the prime minister, the ministers of every other branch of government affairs, and the other leaders of the Kingdom of Salutania. No one else was permitted to join.

During a certain month's council, the king reported that the ceremony for the Saint's debut into high society and the accompanying ball would soon be held. No one was surprised, as the members of the council had been the ones to discuss how they would conduct these events.

The prime minister also reminded everyone to take care with their behavior toward the Saint, as well as other precautions. He did this not only out of consideration for her but to prevent future gestures that the nobles had no doubt already been planning to make—gestures that risked offending the Saint.

For example, he told them that the palace would be collecting all tea and evening party invitations addressed to the Saint. Unfortunately, he said, the Saint was socially inexperienced, and she had chosen to decline in advance. Those who had been planning to make her acquaintance through such means were forced to change their plans.

The sort of noble who had been put in charge of a ministry had the emotional control to conceal their innermost thoughts, but there were others among the nobility who were less able—or less willing—to hide their displeasure. The prime minister had made further arrangements because he expected to have to deal with their frustration.

“That concludes today's council.” The prime minister brought that month's meeting to a close.

After the council, Josef, the minister of military services, sent a sidelong glance at the ministers of internal affairs and finance, who were talking to one another as he left the chamber.

While making his way to his office in the palace, Josef noticed Marquis Ashley

walking toward him. Marquis Ashley's slightly wavy blond hair and azure eyes, which slanted down at the outer corners, gave him a gentle look and made him appear younger than he actually was. However, despite his friendly appearance, he was quite cunning, and Josef found him untrustworthy.

Marquis Ashley was also the father of the crown prince's fiancée, Elizabeth. Despite Josef's occupation, the marquis was of higher rank than him. Not only was he older, but they were acquaintances as well.

As Josef was considering at least giving a greeting to Marquis Ashley, the other man smiled and raised a hand. Josef stopped and bowed slightly.

"Good day, Lord Hawke," said the marquis. "Has today's council concluded?"

"A good day to you as well, Your Excellency. Indeed, the council just adjourned. Were you on your way to see His Majesty?"

"Yes, I was. He summoned me, most likely to discuss the Lady Saint's debut ceremony."

The two talked cheerfully enough, but they were both high-ranking nobles with a long history of navigating the social world. Marquis Ashley had casually mentioned why he was summoned while they were at the end of a corridor where not many people passed, but they were still in the palace, and you never knew who might be listening. In fact, at that very moment, an escort of knights and a handful of lady's maids were in the same corridor.

The minister of internal affairs was about to inform the noble families of each house about the Saint's upcoming debut. While it wouldn't necessarily be problematic if this information were made public now, the marquis surely had some ulterior motive in talking about this topic at this moment.

Josef made sure his expression didn't change to one of suspicion as he said, "Is that so?"

"He didn't mention it during the council?"

"In fact, we just learned about it from His Majesty. The minister of internal affairs should be in contact with each house shortly."

"Excellent. And there will be a ball right after the ceremony?"

“So I heard.”

“Wonderful. I just know how much everyone is looking forward to making the Saint’s acquaintance. Speaking of which, this will be her first formal ball, won’t it? I bet there will be plenty of people who hope to be her escort.”

“I am sure you’re right.”

The minister of internal affairs was also supposed to tell everyone about the ball. His discussions weren’t secret or anything. However, something about what the marquis said about the Saint’s escort nagged at Josef. He was sure this was what the marquis really wanted to discuss.

Josef must have been right, because the marquis began to press him, though his expression remained unchanged. “How about the third lordling of your family?” he asked.

“What about him?”

“Is he hoping to be her escort? I’m sure he is.”

“That’s a good question. I haven’t heard anything either way from my little brother.”

By third lordling, the marquis was referring to Knight Commander Albert of the Knights of the Third Order, the third son of Marquis Hawke. Josef was the oldest in his family, making Albert his little brother.

Josef wasn’t lying either. He hadn’t heard anything; he was merely voicing that he did anticipate his brother asking Sei to the ball.

“Really now? From what I’ve heard, your brother is quite infatuated with the Lady Saint.”

This was common knowledge among the nobility. Denying it would have made Josef sound the fool, so he confirmed it with a wry smile. “He does indeed seem to be.”

This made the marquis’s smile even wider. “And the Lady Saint places a great deal of trust in him, from what I’ve heard. If he were to ask her to the ball, surely she would accept then and there.”

“I cannot say one way or the other. The Lady Saint has many acquaintances

aside from Albert.”

“This is true. However, not including those from the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, they’re all from the knight orders or the Royal Magi Assembly... In other words, all part of the military.” Though the marquis maintained his smile, there was a cold glint in his eye.

The mood instantly turned heavy, but not so much as to make Josef hold back his words. He smiled similarly. “Surely that is only natural, as they’ve traveled together often to slay monsters. What’s more, from what I hear, the Lady Saint rarely leaves the research institute, so she hardly has any chance to meet new people.”

“I’ve heard much the same. I’ve also heard that the farthest she ever travels is the palace library.”

“I have moreover heard that she has come to the palace more often of late for lessons, and that she has made the acquaintance of a number of individuals outside of the military.”

“Well now, I haven’t heard anything about that.”

“In any case, the Lady Saint will be the one who picks her escort. It is out of our control either way.”

“Is that what they said during the council?”

“That’s right. They are leaving it up to the Lady Saint to choose. Although, who’s to say whether His Majesty won’t change his mind and decide to be her escort instead?”

Balls were in essence events that allowed unmarried men and women to meet. The Kingdom of Salutania practiced monogamy, so one might have assumed that the king would be unfit to act as Sei’s escort, given that he already had two children. However, Josef had reason to mention him: the queen had passed away due to illness over ten years ago, and the king had yet to remarry. On paper, there would be no problem if the widower king asked to be Sei’s escort.

Not to mention, even if Sei and Albert loved one another, the king had the power to forcibly step between them. Sei’s position in society aside, Albert was

the son of a noble and therefore of a lower rank than the king.

The marquis immediately dismissed this notion, however. “Ha ha ha. As if that would ever happen. The king’s heart has only ever belonged to one woman, and it will always be hers alone.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Just like everyone knew of Sei and Albert’s relationship, they also knew of the deep love the king still held for his dearly departed queen. The fact that the king had yet to choose another queen, despite all the efforts that had been poured into coaxing him to make another match, was proof enough of that.

Josef brought up the king more because he couldn’t completely deny the fact that Sei had few acquaintances outside of military circles, much less any close ones.

“Well, I should be going. I mustn’t keep His Majesty waiting. Sorry for keeping you overlong,” the marquis said.

“Not at all. I apologize for detaining you.”

This was not a matter for them to decide. It was all up to Sei. Once the marquis had extracted that information from Josef, he ended the conversation.

Since Marquis Ashley was on his way to meet with the king, Josef didn’t try to stop him from leaving.

“I don’t think Knight Commander Hawke would be a bad choice,” Marquis Ashley murmured in Josef’s ear as he passed.

Josef raised one corner of his lips.

Houses Hawke and Ashley belonged to different factions—military and civilian respectively—but several generations back, members from both houses had been married into the royal family. Consequently, they were united in the sense that they were both loyal to the royal line. The fact that Marquis Ashley, who was so close to the king, vocally expressed that Albert wouldn’t be a bad choice very possibly meant that the king felt the same.

The marquis had discussed such matters with Josef in public so that everyone would hear it. He made it out to be small talk, but in the end, he was putting on

a show for any people unhappy with the fact that they had been unable to make Sei's acquaintance since they weren't part of the military. The marquis's remark was likely meant to serve as a vicarious vent for their feelings. Either that, or he wanted to put Josef off guard.

Josef expected that everyone would be talking about this conversation within a day or two.

There were also those among the nobles who would hear only what they wanted to hear. Some others would read into Josef's words and assume that House Hawke would be unable to actively affect any decision made about Sei's escort. Even though Josef hadn't said as much, such people were no doubt about to let their guards down.

Now what should his next move be? Josef thought this over as he headed to his office.

House Hawke of the Hawke marquisdom had been a military family for generations and led the military powers of the Kingdom of Salutania. The head of the family had three sons, all of whom held important military offices. Josef, the oldest, was the minister of military services; Erhart was magus of the Royal Magi Assembly; and Albert was the knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order. Due to their positions, each was very busy. Furthermore, while Josef lived at their estate in the capital, the other two lived at their affiliated barracks, so the three rarely saw one another.

The three brothers were now gathered in the living room of their family's estate. It was the day after every noble house had received word about the Saint's debut ceremony. Josef was the one who had summoned them there. He had invited them all to have a long overdue family dinner, to which Erhart and Albert had agreed.

The dinner was just an excuse, however. Both brothers assumed Josef had some other motive for inviting them, one that he couldn't say publicly, likely related to military affairs. In the end, the real reason took them by surprise.

They didn't find out until after dinner, when Josef took them from the dining room to the living room.

“You want to introduce us to potential matches?” Erhart’s whole face contorted into a grimace.

Albert’s expression matched his brother’s. It wasn’t as bad as Erhart’s, but it was contorted all the same.

Neither Albert nor Erhart were keen on the idea of marriage. Their reluctance was rooted in what they had witnessed their elder brother endure. All the way up to the day of Josef’s marriage, countless women had been at each other’s throats as they vied to become his wife.

Josef had been seen as an ideal match, in that he came from a good family, was handsome, and had bountiful future prospects. Everyone knew he had been swarmed by young ladies hoping to become his fiancée ever since his childhood. While these women had never fought in front of him, fierce quarrels had broken out whenever he was out of sight.

However, Josef was the heir of the house that controlled the military circles, and he had many people to act as his eyes and ears. All sorts of information had reached Josef from these people, including information about the clashes between the women. Hearing about these disputes had shattered any feelings he might have had about them.

But he was the heir to a noble house. He was obligated to marry and produce an heir. This understanding had been ingrained in Josef throughout his education, so he’d quickly decided that a marriage for political gain would be best. When he reached his final year at the Royal Academy, he agreed to an engagement with a woman his parents introduced him to and married her upon graduation.

Fortunately, his parents had taken care to consider Josef’s personality and interests when picking a potential fiancée. As it turned out, he’d liked her, and he later learned that she felt the same way. As a result, though it had been an arranged marriage of convenience, Josef and his wife were on good terms with one another even after all these years.

While Josef’s marriage was going well, his brothers were a different matter.

After seeing all those women fighting over Josef, both Erhart and Albert had kept their distances from women altogether. Having been at an impressionable

age while he witnessed Josef's experiences, Erhart had taken his avoidance to such an extent that high society now considered it common knowledge that he hated women.

Even when the brothers reached the eligible age to hunt for a potential wife, they gave the women who followed them the cold shoulder and avoided social opportunities as much as possible. Around the time of Erhart's graduation, their parents couldn't even force the two to attend evening parties and the like. After all, the brothers said, Josef's wife had just given birth. The Hawke heir was secured. As a result, even though people married at earlier ages in the Kingdom of Salutania than in Japan, the two brothers were still bachelors.

With age, both Erhart and Albert had eased up on their avoidance of women. However, they still limited their interactions to work-related matters and never smiled or behaved amiably toward them—to say nothing of how they still avoided social scenes.

Considering all that, there was no way they could happily receive the prospect of being introduced to potential marriage matches—especially Albert, who now had someone whom he held close in his heart.

“This is unnecessary.” Albert curtly shot his brother down.

“At least hear me out. It's the lady everyone's talking about these days.” Josef grinned at his youngest brother.

“And just who might that be?” Albert raised an eyebrow.

“A lady you're both acquainted with: Lady Sei Takanashi. You know her, don't you?” Josef said Sei's name with a devious chuckle, making Erhart sigh and Albert's eyes widen with surprise.

Josef was quite satisfied with their responses, so he continued.

While Sei had yet to make her debut into high society, some nobles knew of her, now that she had helped with slaying monsters. She took her job seriously and the lords of the domains she went to spoke well of her. According to what Josef had heard, even though her boss, Johan, told her to restrain herself, she was always getting herself into trouble everywhere she went. But that only served to make people like her even more.

While there were those who merely saw value in her status as the Saint, there were some people who were trying to sort out how they could use her for their own ends. They were paying close attention to the words of the aforementioned lords whose domains she had visited. For that reason, many houses were trying to offer their sons as potential matches in an effort to lay claim to Sei.

The two Hawke brothers, who actually knew Sei, listened to Josef's explanation quietly, but when the mention of marriage matches for Sei arose, Albert's expression turned grim.

Josef had remained relatively expressionless during this conversation, but now he smiled again. "So, I was thinking of naming someone from our family as her potential husband-to-be. Lucky for me, we've got two eligible bachelors. And both of you already know her too."

The brothers had been wearing bored looks, but now they turned serious.

"Only one of you can be her potential fiancé. We'd face some difficulties if I put both of your names into the ring, even with our family being as powerful as it is. So, which of you would like to court her?"

House Hawke was indeed one of the most powerful houses in Salutania, both in terms of social position and political power. However, if they were to abuse that power and put forth both brothers as potential matches for the Saint, other houses would be sure to emulate them and do the same. Josef had no desire to encourage pointless mayhem. Therefore, he wanted to pick just one of them.

Of course, Josef had heard about Albert's relationship with the Saint, so in actuality, he intended to back Albert.

But Erhart took both of them by surprise when he said, "It can be either of us. I don't mind either way."

Josef and Albert gazed at Erhart with wide eyes.

Erhart seemed to take no notice though, and he continued. "I have worked with her on several occasions. She is diligent and well educated. She is not prideful or flirtatious. I wouldn't mind being her potential match."

While Erhart was no longer so cold toward women, it was still quite rare for him to speak about a woman in such a positive way, let alone to actually praise her. One might say that this kind of event only happened once in a blue moon. Moreover, this time he had even explicitly stated that he was open to marrying Sei.

Josef and Albert could only gape at Erhart.

Erhart then glanced at Albert from the corner of his eye. “However, I have heard about Albert’s relationship with her. Albert would be the better pick between us, wouldn’t he?”



For a moment, Josef was at a loss for words. “Very well, then,” he said when he recovered. “I’m asking just in case, but you’re all right with this, aren’t you, Albert?”

“Yes, I am.”

Erhart’s first statement had come out of nowhere for his brothers, but it seemed he was half-joking, judging from the way the corner of his lips now curved up. Josef leaned wearily back on the sofa. For a moment, Albert looked relieved as well, but then he shot a bitter look at Erhart. Erhart rarely joked about anything, so Albert had thought his brother was serious. He really didn’t want to have to wage war against his own blood.

“Based on what I’ve heard, Albert has the advantage. However, we won’t know for sure until Sei decides.” Josef didn’t move from his position, but his expression turned serious, leading Albert to straighten his posture.

“I understand.” Albert grimaced with a nod.

He knew quite well what his oldest brother was getting at: he foresaw a fierce competition for the Saint’s hand. They themselves had once been the objects of such competitions. It was easy to imagine what was about to occur.

Josef then shifted his attention to Erhart. “By the by, will Grand Magus Drewes be in attendance at the ball?”

“His family has told him to do as much, but he seems unenthusiastic about the prospect.”

House Drewes had a history of producing grand magi of the Royal Magi Assembly, but they surprisingly lacked a lust for power compared to other houses. However, the current head of the family was quite ambitious. The second he’d realized his own son didn’t possess the abilities required to be grand magus, he had adopted a commoner who did have the potential. In so doing, he had clung to what power he possessed and used his adopted son as a pawn to once more secure the position of grand magus for House Drewes.

There was no way that same man wouldn’t want to leverage Yuri to seize yet more power, especially since Yuri already knew the Saint.

“I see. Well, I personally would like to see him in attendance,” Josef continued.

“Why’s that?” Erhart asked.

“All manner of houses are even now planning to make Lady Sei’s acquaintance during the ball. I think it would be best to place as many of our allies near her as possible.”

“You consider him, of all people, an ally?”

“From a military standpoint, yes. Besides, we shouldn’t have any problems, so long as you keep a tight rein on him.”

“It’ll be troublesome, but if it’s unavoidable, I’ll do it.” Erhart sighed, not bothering to hide his displeasure.

If Albert was to be Sei’s potential escort, then there was no reason for Erhart to attend the ball as well. However, Josef was clearly hoping that both he and Yuri would go anyway.

“We could ask some of my knights to help out instead?” Albert suggested with an unhappy look, but Josef shook his head with a grim chuckle.

“That could prove a bit problematic. While I want us to surround her with as many allies as possible, we can’t completely shut out everyone else.”

In other words, it was important to involve members of other houses in their plan, ones who weren’t subject to the influence of House Hawke. If the Saint danced only with knights from the Third Order, it would look like House Hawke was trying to block all other candidates from engaging with her, and they would surely be resented for it. So, if they had Yuri dance with her to make it look like House Drewes was in the running, there would be nothing to complain about.

“House Drewes is quite influential in their own right. That should make it seem like we have a rival,” Josef said.

“Yes, but—”

“Don’t make that face. It’s true that Grand Magus Drewes does seem to have some interest in Lady Sei, but only in as much as he’s intrigued by her magic, yes?”

Most people just assumed that Yuri was interested in Sei's magical power as well as her powers as the Saint. Albert thought the same. However, watching Yuri's behavior toward her always bothered him, just a tiny bit. Was it mere jealousy, or was it an omen of something else?

Albert couldn't figure it out, so he tentatively nodded in agreement with his brother's words.

"So it'll be us, House Drewes, and...perhaps Johan will be going as well. So with House Valdec, that'll make three houses. Ideally, I'd want people from two or three more houses among our allies," Josef continued.

"I suppose. However, it's hard to think of any other houses that we could potentially control," Albert agreed.

"Especially if it has to be someone you don't dislike."

"Please, Brother, you don't have to worry about that."

"Ha ha, sorry. Don't get so mad. Oh, how about the commander of the Knights of the Second Order?"

"I don't believe Sei cares for him."

"Then wouldn't that make him perfect for the job?"

"Wait, do you mean that fellow?" Erhart frowned. "Isn't he married already?"

"Is he?" Josef asked.

Everyone in the military knew how the commander of the Knights of the Second Order worshiped Sei. Even Josef had heard about it.

In terms of his social status and house, the man certainly fit their conditions for a potential ally whom they could control. However, Erhart's point meant that he couldn't be included in their circle. As balls were fundamentally places for potential marriage matches to meet, it would be most advantageous to surround Sei with bachelors.

However, Erhart was wrong; the commander was actually single. Mind you, Erhart wasn't trying to upset the man's chances, he said this because he genuinely thought the man was already spoken for. Josef had only brought the man up at random, so he wasn't attached to the idea of bringing the

commander into their circle of allies either.

Thus, unfortunately for the commander, he was easily cast out of their plan.

The Hawke brothers continued talking through the evening, though they did so in such a manner that it couldn't quite be called strategizing.

Several days after all the noble houses had been informed of the Saint's debut ceremony, Johan was in a small hall at his family's estate in the capital, practicing how to dance by himself.

Way back when, during his instruction, he'd had both music to listen to and someone to show him how it was done. Now he had neither. However, his body seemed to remember the steps well enough. Johan was relieved by this, since simple as the steps were, it had been so long since his last turn on the dance floor.

He danced over and over, and just as he decided it was a good time to stop, he heard someone clapping.

Johan stopped and looked toward the door to find a man who looked quite similar to himself, smiling as he clapped. It was Lorant, Johan's brother, who was five years his senior.

"I haven't seen you dance in a long time."

"Yes, well, I haven't seen you here at this hour in a long time." Johan looked at his brother quizzically.

Their father was the current head of the family, and Lorant was his right-hand man. It was still light outside, and Lorant was usually terribly busy, so it was unusual to see him home at this time of day.

"I heard you were practicing, and I had to come and see with my own eyes." Lorant's answer, which wasn't really an answer, made Johan furrow his brows.

House Valdec was high-ranking even among other counts, and they had an influential voice at the palace. As a result, Lorant had been given an even stricter education than Johan, as Lorant was the heir to the family. As luck would have it, Lorant was brilliant, and he'd grown to fulfill everyone's

expectations as the heir of the family.

Lorant had soft features, like Johan, as well as a gentle demeanor. At a glance, he appeared sociable and amiable. However, those who knew him understood that this was not actually true. It went without saying that his younger brother was aware that his brother's personality was appropriate for the sort of person who would become the next head of a noble family. In short, no matter how unusual the occasion, Lorant hadn't come just to see his little brother practice dancing.

He must be here for some other reason, Johan thought as he waited to hear what his brother would say next.

"I assume you're practicing because you're planning on attending the upcoming ball?" Lorant asked.

"That's right."

"Is it because the Lady Saint will be there?"

"I am her boss, in a way."

The fact that Lorant brought up the Saint meant that he wanted to ask Johan about Sei. She and her upcoming debut had been the topic on every noble's lips since the moment they were notified of the event.

Sei hardly ever left the palace and research institute, so she hadn't made that many friends outside the related social circles. She was more or less only familiar with the researchers, knights from the Second and Third Orders, and a few palace officials. That was it. She knew hardly anyone who attended evening parties and the like. As a result, it was now common knowledge that at social gatherings, people flocked to those who did know the Saint in order to eke out whatever information they could.

Johan himself never attended such gatherings, but Lorant did. Lorant had never met Sei, but his little brother was the head researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. It was entirely likely that Lorant was being swarmed with people asking him what he had heard about the Saint. Therefore, Johan assumed that Lorant had come to hear what he had to say about Sei.

But would his older brother really spend the time to come all the way to the

estate dance hall just to ask him about that?

“You must have to look after her all the time,” Lorant said.

“Somewhat... She is in a unique position, after all.”

“Indeed. I bet she’ll have all manner of people asking her to dance at the ball.”

Johan chuckled humorlessly in response. There it was. Sei was indeed the reason that Johan was choosing to venture out into high society after all these years to actually attend a ball.

As Josef had explained to his brothers, Sei’s value had greatly increased, along with her reputation. As a result, Johan predicted that many people would try to make her acquaintance at the first ball that she would formally attend.

As yet, she had been surrounded only by those who already knew her. It wasn’t that hard to imagine; a social opportunity such as this one would be the ideal first step for someone who wanted to make her acquaintance. After all, they would first have to talk to her.

That was fine and everything, but the real problem was dancing. Sei was taking dance lessons at the palace, so it wasn’t the act itself that was the problem. Rather, certain etiquette had to be followed in regard to dancing, and it could be a bit problematic, so they had to be cautious.

Most saliently, the person of the opposite sex with whom you danced most frequently was considered to be your first choice in a marriage partner. Some people used this to their advantage, hoping to make it seem that their intended partner was in love with them and thereby compelling them to accept a proposal. Because of this, people generally didn’t dance with the same partner more than twice, unless it was someone to whom they were already engaged or married.

Considering Sei’s social position and reputation, it was highly possible that people would try to use this etiquette to their advantage.

The palace anticipated this happening as well, so they had warned people to refrain from this sort of behavior when notifying them about the ball. Thus, the chances were that it was *less* likely to happen, but that didn’t mean everyone

was going to behave.

Considering Sei's personality, if someone asked her to dance, she would probably find herself unable to decline. She was taking classes on etiquette, though, so if someone were to ask her in a gentlemanly way, she *might* have it in her to turn down a second dance. However, Johan was worried that if someone was pushy about it, she would be unable to adeptly avoid dancing with them multiple times.

Sei was an adult; Johan knew this. He probably didn't need to be so worried about her. Not to mention, most everyone knew that Sei and Albert were quite close. Even if someone managed to dance with her more than twice, he doubted they could manage to unseat Albert.

Nevertheless, his two friends were not yet engaged. There were surely some who still nurtured a sliver of hope of making the Saint their own. Obviously, those people would pose their own kinds of problems.

But if Johan's worries turned out to be right, then he had some planning to do. It would be best if nothing troublesome happened. So, he had come up with the plan to limit Sei's dance partners. If he, Albert, and one other person danced with her, then she could claim she was tired or some such when declining other invitations to dance. So long as she danced a few times, then Johan or Albert could probably get away with turning them down in her stead.

It was for that reason that Johan had decided to attend a ball for the first time in such a long while.

As if having anticipated this, Lorant put a hand to his chin in thought for a moment before a wide smile spread across his face. "So, then you're planning to dance with the Lady Saint?"

"That's right. It would be best if she danced with people she knows first."

"This is true. Are you planning to dance two or three times with her?"

"Huh?" Johan looked at his brother, for a moment baffled in a very un-noble manner.

"People have been discussing who the Lady Saint might take for a husband."

“A husband?”

“Yes, every house is picking their potential suitor for her. And the top prospect from our family is you, Johan.”

From this, Johan realized the *real* reason his brother was here was to discuss potential suitors for Sei. He had been so busy thinking about the ball that he hadn't noticed that everyone was more focused on the future beyond that single event.

Johan could understand what his brother was saying. He was the one who was closest to Sei among all House Valdec, including their branch families. They didn't have a bad relationship either. It wouldn't be odd at all if House Valdec elevated him as the top prospective suitor.

“And what are you planning to do by naming me as her potential fiancé?” Johan asked with some annoyance, even though he already knew what Lorant would say.

“Why, send a letter detailing your background, along with your portrait, to the palace, of course. Although, I suppose in your case the portrait is unnecessary.”

In other words, he planned to try to get their marriage arranged. Unlike usual, though, they would be submitting his information to the palace instead of to the woman's family.

Johan pressed his right hand to his forehead, feeling a bit of a headache come on. “Pass. Please reject the notion on my behalf.”

“You know how it is. The branch families just won't give up on the idea.”

“But still.”

“I've done so much to accommodate you already, yet you're being so cold about it all.”

“Ah. I am sorry for that, however—”

“Perhaps you could see it as repaying your older brother a bit for all he's done for you.”

“That's neither here nor there. Besides, if it's the business about the company

you're referring to, I'm pretty sure we benefited both monetarily and in other ways as well." Johan glared narrowly at Lorant, who chuckled with a shrug.

Johan was well aware that both his father and Lorant had benefited from the sale of Sei's cosmetics. He also knew that nobles from other houses had been giving them trouble just before Sei decided to establish her own company.

Nevertheless, the fact was that House Valdec had profited in some way or another by acting as the intermediary for that company. As a result, Johan didn't feel like he owed his brother a debt great enough to warrant entertaining this idea.

Of course, Lorant knew this, so he had meant it jokingly.

"Besides, do you really want to oppose House Hawke?" Johan asked.

"Absolutely not."

"Then just give up on the idea. Not to mention, I would loathe to be an obstacle in my good friend's love life."

"Are you sure? I thought it was a pretty good idea."

Even if Johan was theoretically an ideal match for Sei, he understood that this was something talked about only among their faction.

At any rate, the *real* best match for Sei was Johan's best friend. Although if Johan's family did try to name him as a suitor, he doubted Albert would be angered. Even so, he brought up House Hawke on purpose, and in so doing managed to get Lorant to give up easily enough.

Lorant was also long-time friends with the Hawke brothers, and he had heard of Albert and Sei's relationship. As such, Lorant had thrown the idea out there more for the sake of doing so. If Johan had said yes, then he would have pursued the idea in earnest.

All the same, Johan was internally screaming that it was the wrong thing to do. He settled for just glaring at his brother.

Lorant didn't seem fazed at all. He just clapped his younger brother on the shoulder and left.

As he watched Lorant walk away, Johan sighed and returned to practicing his

dance steps.

Act 3:

Goals

AFTER MY UNEXPECTED MEETING with Prince Ten'yuu, Jude and I immediately went to Johan to tell him what had happened.

"What? Prince Ten'yuu was here?"

"Yes. He approached us out of nowhere while we were watering the herbs."

"What? I had no idea about this." Johan covered his face with his palm and tilted his head back.

Johan informed us that he hadn't been told that Prince Ten'yuu would be coming to the institute. Had he heard, I'm sure that he would've alerted us first thing in the morning. In fact, since we had been expressly trying to avoid such a meeting, he probably would've informed me the second he caught wind of it.

But no one had given him a heads up.

Jude and I exchanged a look. I was sure we were all feeling the same thing right now, Johan included. Sure enough, Johan immediately sent a message to the palace. We had to report this at once.

We soon learned that the palace hadn't had any idea that this visit was going to happen either. It seemed that Prince Ten'yuu had just decided to show up without prior notice.

Was that okay? No, it wasn't. Of course this was troublesome. For one thing, Prince Ten'yuu was royalty from another country. It was problematic to have someone like that just wandering palace grounds. Not to mention, he had shown up at a research facility that was chock full of confidential information. He claimed he had gotten lost while on a walk, but it wasn't any surprise that he was suspected of industrial espionage—especially since the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora was where the Saint worked.

However, no one had told anyone from Zaidera that the Saint could be found there. Thus, this incident ended with the palace giving the prince a stern

warning. And it wasn't any surprise that they assigned him more guards so as to watch him around the clock.

Speaking of which, it wasn't like they hadn't assigned guards to the prince before. The knights assigned to him had offered to accompany him on his fateful walk, but he had politely refused, saying he was just going to get some fresh air in the garden that he could see from his chambers.

Apparently, a single knight had been watching the prince from a short distance away, just in case, but the knight had suddenly been called over by someone, and he had lost sight of the prince in that moment.

If you asked me, the problem was sending only *one* knight to follow him after he declined their escort.

In short, Prince Ten'yuu wound up bumping into us after one bad thing had led to another. But now that his visits to the institutes were over, I was relieved to see the palace take a stricter stance. The prince was told to inform the palace of his wish to wander ahead of time from now on. I thought I was in the clear.

However, it wasn't until much after that I realized I was mistaken.

I had heard that Prince Ten'yuu focused his studies on medicinal herbs. This was the interest that determined how he used the free time in his schedule after his tours were over. So, he came back to visit the institute. However, I didn't see him again, as we were informed of his arrival ahead of time, and I made sure to go elsewhere when he was due to come.

But what was I supposed to do if he asked for me personally?

"What do you mean?" I asked when that question was posed to me.

"Hm, you see, whenever he comes by, he keeps asking if the black-haired researcher is here."

I was in Johan's office as he explained, his expression perplexed, that Prince Ten'yuu had been searching for me during his frequent visits to the institute.

I was the only researcher with black hair.

The day I'd met him, he hadn't made any comments about my appearance, but it seemed that he remembered the color of my hair. Even though he hadn't

said anything about it, perhaps the fact that I shared a hair color similar to his had interested him after all?

“This isn’t good,” I said.

“You can say that again.”

We both frowned. It wasn’t like I could say I’d be willing to see the prince again, given that the palace had told me not to. However, since we had met once before, this constant absence of mine had potential to become a problem in itself. It would definitely look like I was avoiding him.

But the fact was that I really *was* trying to avoid him. Yet it would lead to trouble if he figured that out.

We both racked our brains, trying to figure out what to do. In the end, we could only come up with one solution: ask the palace to figure it out for us. It’s always best to ask a higher power when you don’t know how to fix a problem.

We got a response the next day. The palace agreed that now that the prince had met me once, it would only lead to more problems if I continued to avoid him.

Johan had a grim look on his face as he told me that I was to be present the next time Prince Ten’yuu visited the institute. I was further warned about several things to keep in mind while he was visiting.

And so, two days after that, we received word that Prince Ten’yuu would once again be our guest. It felt sooner than I had expected, almost as if on cue, but that was probably just my imagination.

According to the prince’s notification, he would arrive in the early afternoon, after he finished some other business he had to attend to.

The day of Prince Ten’yuu’s visit came, and I was filling bottles of mid-grade HP potions to be sold to the knightly orders when I heard a tiny voice coming from the door to the room. “Oh...”

Jude and I looked in the direction of the voice to find Prince Ten’yuu with a surprised look on his face, standing there with his attendant.

I placed the bottle I had been holding on my desk and bowed respectfully.

“There’s no need for that,” the prince said immediately. “Are you making potions right now?”

“Yes, that’s right,” I replied.

“That’s quite a number of them.”

“We make the potions the palace uses as well, so it does come out to be quite a lot.”

I knew he was going to comment on that. I’d had no other assignments recently, so it felt a bit refreshing to be working on potions again. The other researchers had grown accustomed to my production rate, so they never said anything about it when I had potion after potion lined up on my desk. However, Prince Ten’yu was captivated.

Because I had been aware he was coming, I had brewed fewer than usual, but it seemed like I had still made too many.

“Were these all made by the same person?” he asked.

“No...”

This was a surprising question coming from him; he had to know how many potions a regular alchemist could make in a day. He was supposed to be well versed in medicinal plants, so there was no way he didn’t know that.

Why would he ask that, then? I looked at him curiously.

Prince Ten’yu smiled bashfully. “Of course they couldn’t have been.”

Even he must have realized that he had said something odd.

Of course, the potions on my desk had in fact all been made by me. However, Johan had told me to hide my skills as best as I could. So, I lied, but I felt incredibly guilty about it; I’m a tragically timid person. That was probably why I trailed off there, and the room sank into silence.

I felt kind of awkward, so I bowed slightly to Prince Ten’yu and went back to work. He must have felt the same way, as he didn’t criticize me for doing so.

While I wordlessly bottled a potion, Prince Ten’yu watched me in silence for a moment before asking if it was a mid-grade HP potion. I nodded, and he

touched his chin as a thoughtful look passed over his face.

Now what?

“Can you not make high-grade HP potions?” he suddenly asked.

“High-grade HP potions?” I accidentally responded with a question. I knew it was a rude thing to do, but before I could say anything else, he continued, unperturbed.

“I was just thinking that, in terms of division of labor, if you had to make this many every day, then it would probably be better to make high-grade potions instead.”

“That’s true. And we do indeed have people who can make them. However, there’s more potential for something to go wrong during the brewing process, so we don’t make the high-grade variety as often.”

“What do you mean by ‘go wrong’?”

“Well, without a high level in your Pharmaceuticals skill, you won’t be successful. Not to mention, most of the required ingredients are expensive.”

“Ah, that’s true.”

You had to make a whole lot of potions in order to raise your Pharmaceuticals skill. It took ordinary alchemists years of brewing mid-grade potions before they could reliably produce the high-grade sort. It didn’t take as much time if you focused on making high-grade potions from the start, but the cost of the needed ingredients was indeed substantial. Plus, you wouldn’t be able to recoup the costs by selling the potions you made if you only turned out duds.

And even if you did manage to somehow raise your level with mid-grade potions, the only way to increase your level after that was to start producing the high-grade variety. And in that case, the cost remained an issue.

The fact that the cost of the materials was high meant that the price of the potions themselves was similarly expensive. Only a very limited number of people could afford high-grade potions, so they were hard to sell. That made it difficult to earn back what you spent making them.

As a result, no one was allowed to make high-grade potions until they had a

high enough level in their Pharmaceuticals skill to create them at a successful rate. That was common knowledge.

Prince Ten'yuu seemed to accept my brief explanation readily enough. He probably already knew what I meant anyway.

Incidentally, as it turned out, I had never once failed to make a high-grade potion. I likely owed my ability to raise my Pharmaceuticals skill level so quickly to the fact that I had more magical power than anyone I'd ever met—as well as the fact that I had access to a research institute.

Basically, because my base level was high, my maximum MP was high too, so in a single day, I could make more potions than your typical alchemist. On top of that, I grew the ingredients for high-grade potions right in the institute's garden, which meant they didn't cost me all that much to make. Finally, I sold the potions I made to the knightly orders, so I recouped my costs smoothly enough.

It was thanks to all this that I had reached a high enough level to consistently churn out these rare and powerful potions.

However, I kept the fact of my high level secret from Prince Ten'yuu. Johan had explicitly ordered me to do so, after all.

After that, we had more or less harmless and inoffensive discussions about herbs, and that was it. Just as I was finished bottling potions, it was time for Prince Ten'yuu to leave.

Now that I didn't have to keep avoiding Prince Ten'yuu, I spent more time in the institute. Truthfully, I wanted to go back to living at the institute again, like I used to, but that motion was rejected. According to the palace officials, it was safer for me to be in the palace. To be fair, it was more secure than the institute, where outsiders frequently visited.

I was at the institute working again when Prince Ten'yuu visited.

I heard from the other researchers that he came extremely often now. According to the palace maids' gossip, he frequently visited the other research facilities as well. Given all that, his schedule was jam-packed enough that

people were starting to worry if he was getting enough rest. Hopefully he wouldn't run himself ragged.

"Are you making potions today too?" he asked as I stirred a small pot.

"Yes, I am."

Normally I would have made them all at once in a cauldron, but I made potions the usual way on the days when Prince Ten'yuu visited.

It was annoying, to tell the truth. However, this was another command from Johan. I was afraid of what would happen if I didn't do as he said. Not to mention, if Prince Ten'yuu saw me making potions with a cauldron, he was sure to start asking me all sorts of difficult questions.

If I had to choose the lesser of two annoyances, obeying Johan's commands was the clear winner. So, I made potions like normal people did. Absolutely normal.

"Are you making mid-grade HP potions today as well?"

"Yes, those are the ones most requested."

"You don't make any other kinds of potions?"

"Once in a while I make MP potions too. Those are mid-grade as well, of course."

"I see."

There were more knights than mages, so I was usually assigned to making HP potions. MP potions, on the other hand, made for about a quarter of the institute's usual quota. The rest of our time was spent on the HP variety. From time to time, we brewed other potions as well, but proportionally, the vast majority of our time was spent on those two main products.

As it turned out, HP and MP potions raised your skill level the same amount, so the general rule of thumb was to make HP potions when trying to level yourself up.

However, that probably wasn't the answer Prince Ten'yuu had been angling for. After I told him I made MP potions too, his facial expression didn't change, though he seemed despondent.

Maybe I should ask what he was hoping for? I thought, but then he spoke first.

“Can you not make any other potions besides those two kinds?”

“You mean besides HP and MP potions? We usually order special brews from other brewers.”

“And you’ve never made them before?”

“I’ve made some simple kinds, like those for curing abnormal status effects.”

With a level high enough to make mid-grade potions, you could make a few kinds of potions that healed status effects. I had made the types I knew the recipes for once, just to try it.

When I told him this, he asked me what types they had been, so I mentioned a few well-known ones. Just as I expected, the prince knew the recipes for them as well.

After chatting for a bit about it, we got to talking about the status cure potions they made in Zaidera. Some of the recipes he described used ingredients I had never heard of, even though they healed the same effects as potions with recipes I knew. These seemed to be ingredients found only in Zaidera. As one would expect, other countries had different kinds of medicinal flora.

As the prince was telling me one recipe, his attendant’s eyebrow twitched for a moment. It occurred to me that the recipe he was describing might not be common. I prayed it wasn’t a state secret.

I continued talking to him about this and that for a good long while. Our conversation was interesting, and before I knew it, it was the end of the workday.

We had never talked for so long before, so I got worried for a moment, but it seemed everything was okay. I asked the prince if he had any other plans for that day and was relieved when he said no.

The following day, I went to the palace library. I didn’t know if they would have them or not, but I wanted to see if there were any books on herbs in

Zaidera.

I had a lot to think about when it came to the prince, but that was one thing, and this was another. As a researcher of potions, I was extremely interested in the ingredients unique to Zaidera.

Using what I learned back in Klausner's Domain, I might be able to come up with a new type of potion, I thought. I just had to learn more.

I actually managed to find some books on Zaidera. However, there weren't that many, just like I feared. What's more, they were more like reports than books, since they were about socioeconomics—knowledge necessary for diplomacy. I didn't find any books about native plants.

If I asked the librarian for an encyclopedia on plants in Zaidera, I was sure they'd order one for me right away. However, this was another world. It would take some time to receive a book from abroad. There was no way I could wait, as someone who had come here with such enthusiasm.

I guess I could search what books we do have to see if there's any mention of plants, I thought as I picked up one of the books about Zaideran economics.

As I skimmed, I found records of the local specialties in all the regions of Zaidera, just like I was hoping for. I focused on this specifically, since I wanted to know if any regions specialized in cultivating and exporting herbs, like Klausner's Domain.

As these were books about another country, they were a bit outdated and didn't cover that many topics. But I looked them over anyway, just to see if anything caught my eye.

"Hmm, too bad. There's nothing written here." After looking through several books, I hadn't found the information I sought.

I raised both arms to stretch, starting to accept that I would probably have to wait for the library to order some books for me. The fastest way to do that would be to ask the librarian. The palace would surely be able to acquire a vast variety of different books.

However, I felt a bit unsure. At present, I had no real need to research herbs from Zaidera. The thought of bothering the palace's librarian with a request for

books for such a personal desire made me feel a bit guilty. I wouldn't have any reservations if I only had a *reason*. Then I could make my request with confidence...

Was that really the only way? After thinking for a bit, Franz's face popped into my head.

My company had been made in order to sell my skincare products, but for one reason or another, Franz was also importing groceries from Zaidera for me. I had a feeling that books were quite a bit out of his field of expertise, but what did it matter at this point? It would be far easier for me to bother him than the palace librarian.

I didn't know if he'd be able to actually acquire any books, but it was worth a shot.

I stood from my seat as I made up my mind to visit the company on my next day off.

On my next day off, I had a meeting with Franz and Oscar at the palace.

Originally, I had planned to go to the company itself, but after I requested the meeting, Franz had said he would rather hold it there. I was disappointed, as I had wanted to see how the shop was doing, but he was adamant, so I relented.

I arrived at the meeting room to find Franz and Oscar already there. I was there on time, but I felt a bit bad. They had probably been waiting for a while. However, when I took my social position into account, I had to be the one who showed up later, so it couldn't be helped. I still wasn't used to this kind of thing, though.

After I said hello to the two of them, I sat down on the sofa. We chatted a bit about how the shop was doing before I asked him the question for which I had called the meeting.

"You would like me to order an encyclopedia of plants found in Zaidera?" Franz asked me.

"That's right."

He dropped his gaze to the table and began thinking it over.

“And what do you want this encyclopedia for?” Oscar asked. “To research more ingredients found in Zaidera?”

“That’s part of it, but I want to know what kind of herbs they grow there too.”

“Herbs?”

“Yeah, we have a guest from Zaidera at the palace right now, you see.”

“Oh, yeah, the imperial prince?”

“Yeah, that’s right. And...”

I told Oscar the events that had led me to want to order this book—how I’d had a chance to talk to the prince at the institute and how he had told me about a potion that used ingredients unique to Zaidera, which made me curious about their herbs.

As I gave my brief explanation, Oscar grew interested, and he began to ask me more questions. “You know a lot about potions, right? Considering how interested you are, does that mean the prince also knows a lot about potions as well?”

“Yeah, I’d say so. And not just potions but herbs too. I heard he’s discussed complicated related subjects with other people as well.”

“Oh yeah? And what did you tell him?”

“Nothing much. All I did was answer his questions.”

“What kind of stuff did he ask?”

“Hmm, for example, he asked if I could make high-grade potions and if I could make potions other than those for recovering HP and MP.”

“Huh. Interesting.”

“And it was while we were talking about potions that could cure status abnormalities that he mentioned herbs from Zaidera.”

“I see.” Oscar touched his fist to his mouth and dropped his gaze to the table.

Now it wasn’t just Franz lost in thought but Oscar too. Had I said something

that sincerely bothered them?

“Is something the matter?” I asked.

“Hmm. So does His Highness also know a great deal about status cure potions?”

“Yeah. He knows the recipes for all sorts of status cure potions, even though they all require different ingredients depending on what they do.”

Oscar and Franz exchanged a look, then turned to me.

“Something has been troubling me as of late,” said Franz.

“Oh? What’s that?” I asked.

“Well, this is part of the reason I decided to meet with you here at the palace.” The usual gentle smile Franz wore vanished, leaving me a bit apprehensive.

What could he mean?

When I asked, it was Oscar who answered. “Do you remember Captain Ceyran, whom we met back in Morgenhaven?”



“Yes, what about him?”

“He’s here as well. And he’s looking for an alchemist.”

“An alchemist?” I couldn’t help but frown at the word. Thinking back to the events in Morgenhaven, a possibility occurred to me. “Do you think it might be because of the potion I gave him?”

“Yup, I do.”

Oscar’s instant confirmation made me hang my head, bewildered.

Back in Morgenhaven, I had given Ceyran one of my own potions, a high-grade HP potion at that. I had worried that he might notice it was more effective than regular potions on the market, but I’d figured I could just claim it was because the potion was high-grade—assuming he even noticed. Besides, only mid-grade potions had been for sale in Morgenhaven. Surely he wouldn’t know the difference, I thought. I had been so sure that I could convince him its grade was the reason for its potency.

However, it seemed that line of thinking had been my downfall.

“I suspect Captain Ceyran’s had some kind of misunderstanding,” Oscar said.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“He probably thinks that there’s someone who sells high-grade potions on the streets or something.”

“Huh?”

I had been disguised as a merchant’s daughter when I met Ceyran. That must have caused the confusion.

Hearing this explanation made an indescribable look cross my face. Oscar chuckled dryly as he told me more about Ceyran’s activities.

Ceyran had been looking for a talented alchemist even before we had met him in Morgenhaven—an exceptionally talented one, in fact. He had yet to find one that fit the bill.

That came as no surprise. Alchemists capable enough to make high-grade potions were usually employed by the government.

Then, in the middle of his search, he had suddenly received that strange potion—and from a commoner, no less. Given Ceyran’s unfamiliarity with Salutania, it wasn’t all that strange that he’d come to believe that he’d be able to find the kind of alchemist he was looking for in the capital, even if he had been having a hard time finding one in Morgenhaven.

Oscar didn’t know the minor details, but it seemed like Ceyran had found hope, and consequently he had started looking for the alchemist responsible for the potion I had given him. However, he had been unable to find them by himself. Not that he had much hope of ever doing so, since there were hardly any alchemists who sold high-grade potions in towns, even in the Kingdom of Salutania. Furthermore, those with such skills were often employed at major companies, and they kept their true identities concealed.

And yet Ceyran still hadn’t given up. As a last resort, he had reached out to directly ask Oscar for assistance.

“Of course, I didn’t tell him the truth,” Oscar said.

“Thank you. So, is this the reason why you asked to meet here in the palace today, Franz?”

“While that is part of it, I do have another reason.”

“Which is?”

Since my debut into high society, the nobility at large now knew what I looked like, so I had planned to go to the shop in disguise. I had intended to wear the same brown-haired wig and glasses that I had worn back in Morgenhaven. But if I had, Ceyran would have been able to recognize me—Ceyran, who had gone so far as to ask the shop about his mystery alchemist.

There was a possibility that he had been keeping an eye on the shop to see if any alchemists stopped by. And if he spotted me visiting, a familiar daughter of a merchant, he might have tried to speak to me.

Frankly, I thought the possibility that this would have happened was terribly high, as Franz and Oscar had refused to tell him the identity of the alchemist. I assumed it was the reason Franz had suggested we meet here, but it turned out that wasn’t it either. I gave Franz a puzzled look.

The real, actual reason was entirely unexpected.

“It’s the captain’s employer that troubles me,” Franz said.

“His employer?”

“Yes. I looked into it a bit, because I was curious as to why the captain was looking for an alchemist in the first place, you see.”

It was something I had overlooked during my dealings with him in Morgenhaven, but Ceyran had an employer. That employer was from a company in Zaidera, and they were the one who Franz had actually been dealing with. That company also had a chairman and a sponsor on top of that. It was the sponsor who concerned Franz.

“It appears that the sponsor is the same imperial prince who is currently in the palace,” Franz told me.

“Huh?” I froze.

“And taking the circumstances into consideration, it’s most likely the truth.” Oscar’s agreement cinched it.

By circumstances, Oscar was referring to how Ceyran’s ship had arrived at Morgenhaven’s port at the same time as the ship Prince Ten’yuu had sailed in on. I didn’t know what exactly he meant by this, so Oscar explained further.

Prince Ten’yuu had crossed the ocean to reach the Kingdom of Salutania. There were all kinds of dangers on the sea, so when crossing it, ships traveled in fleets. This particular fleet had been made up of the ship the most important person traveled on and the ships guarding that ship. However, it was common for other kinds of ships to join too, for example, ships ferrying people with whom the important person had good relations.

This time, the most important person was Prince Ten’yuu, and the people in his retinue who traveled with him were scholars and merchants. Based on that, Franz had deduced that Ceyran’s employer was connected to Prince Ten’yuu. After some further investigation, he had discovered that Prince Ten’yuu was the sponsor of that employer’s company.

“What do you mean by sponsor?” I asked.

“Someone with a position similar to yours with our company. Although I doubt the prince has been developing new products like you have.”

Me? I’m considered a sponsor? Oh yeah, I suppose my social position is more or less on the same level as a ruling monarch.

Oscar must have guessed what I was thinking, because he started laughing, thoroughly amused.

I never would have guessed that Prince Ten’yuu had a connection to Ceyran...

Okay, time to recap. Franz and Oscar were worried about stuff, so they had decided to meet me at the palace. One of the things they were worried about was the fact that Ceyran was looking for an alchemist. The reason he had started searching for one in Salutania was because of the potion I had given him back in Morgenhaven, but he had in fact been searching for a skilled alchemist for a long time. The other thing they were worried about was Prince Ten’yuu, who it turned out was connected to Ceyran.

These two things combined had led them to come up with the following theory: Ceyran was looking for an alchemist because Prince Ten’yuu had asked him to. The fact that the prince was so knowledgeable about herbs and potions supported this theory.

That was the reason why they had asked to hold this meeting here in the safety of the palace. When I started considering the implications of the prince’s sponsorship on Ceyran’s behavior, I had a feeling that Franz and Oscar might have concluded the same thing.

“What if it’s not Ceyran who’s really looking for an alchemist, but the prince?” I asked.

“We also think that might be a strong possibility.” Franz nodded with a solemn expression.

They think so too, huh? I frowned. I had a bad feeling about this. *But why is he looking for an alchemist? Taking everything into consideration, I get the feeling that he’s not simply looking for someone who’s really good at making potions.*

“That all being said, we’d like you to stay away from the shop for the time being,” said Oscar.

“I understand.”

“It’d be one thing if we were just dealing with Captain Ceyran, but His Highness is another matter entirely. I doubt we’d be able to fool him for long.”

“What do you mean?”

Oscar was referring to the company itself. During his dealings with Ceyran in Morgenhaven, Oscar had used another company as a middleman. He explained that he had done this because he had gotten the feeling that it would be the safest thing to do after I gave Ceyran that potion.

It had worked. Ceyran assumed that Oscar and I belonged to that middleman company. Ceyran must have made his inquiries about the alchemist at that middleman company too.

However, everything those middlemen bought from Ceyran ultimately wound up at the Saint’s company. If he tracked where the shipments went, then he might figure out the connection to my company.

I wondered if I could visit the shop in a different disguise. However, Oscar dashed that hope. “We can’t be sure they won’t figure out that any disguise you wear and the Saint are the same person, so just avoid it altogether just in case.”

“I guess you’re right.”

Even if they didn’t put two and two together, if I was spotted frequenting the shop, then there was a high risk that they might be able to determine the source of the potion.

It was entirely possible that all our efforts would prove fruitless, but if we wanted to avoid letting Ceyran or the prince make these connections, for now I was to stay away from the shop.

But after thinking about everything, I had a feeling that Prince Ten’yu already knew who I was. So far, all he had done was ask me about herbs and potions. It seemed harmless enough, so...perhaps things would be all right the way they were.

I left my meeting with Franz and Oscar feeling unsure about that.

I was reading a book I had borrowed from the palace library when I heard a lively voice from the door to the institute. Prince Ten'yu had arrived, just as we had been informed he would in the morning.

I turned a page as I listened to the hustling and bustling get gradually closer.

"Hello," I heard from behind me.

I turned around, pretending to have only just noticed him. I saw Prince Ten'yu, his attendant, and two knights who were his escort. There was also a researcher, who I assumed had been chatting with him until now.

The prince stood at the door for only a moment before making his way over to me. I still hadn't greeted him yet, but he didn't show any sign of caring.

I tried to stand up to curtsy, but he waved me down. Then his gaze fell to the books on my desk behind me.

"Are you researching something today?" the prince asked.

"Yes. I am currently researching high-grade potions for curing status abnormalities."

"High-grade, you say?"

"Yes. While I typically make mid-grade potions, after our discussion the other day, my curiosity was piqued, so I decided to do a little bit of studying."

When I told him this, it worked as I expected: I managed to grab his interest. He looked over the contents of the book with much curiosity.

I mentally sighed with relief.

After my meeting with Franz and Oscar the other day, I had been racking my brain to try to figure out how to deal with the prince from now on. I had heard that he would be studying in Salutania for a whole year. I didn't have any confidence at all that I'd be able to hide my true identity for that long.

So what was I to do? Perhaps it would have been best to just keep dealing with him the same way I had been. But I wasn't willing to just spin my wheels until his time in the kingdom was over.

The idea my tiny brain came up with was to take action to put this problem to

rest as soon as possible. First, I decided to try to figure out Prince Ten'yuu's goal. Without knowing his goal, I couldn't act, so my ignorance was likely putting me at a disadvantage. Information was key.

Also, frankly, I was exhausted. I was an anxious mess, always afraid that he'd figure out who I really was. Franz, Oscar, and I had deliberated a bit, but in the end, all we could do was hypothesize and guess. I was incredibly tired of having to walk on eggshells because of theories. Therefore, it would be far easier to figure out his goal and make choices from there.

However, I knew I might really screw up if I tried to be too aggressive. Thus, I decided to take a more passive approach. For example, leaving things in the prince's view that might be related to his goals and thereby inviting conversation.

And so, I selected a book from the palace library based on my previous conversations with the prince. It was a book containing the recipes for high-grade status cure potions.

"These high-grade potions sure cure a lot of different illnesses," I remarked.

"Yes. It's the same in my country as well."

"Is that so? There are simply so many of them that it would be hard to remember them all." I smiled in amusement as I complained about the sheer extent of the variety. The prince did the same.

There really were a whole lot of these kinds of potions. And truthfully, I didn't know that much about them at all. I was only pretending to know a bit to get information out of the prince.

The reason I didn't know much about status cure potions was because I'd never had a need to learn them. I had only made high-grade HP potions in order to raise my Pharmaceuticals skill level, after all. Not to mention, I just never really had a chance to make them anyway, since the palace ordered them from elsewhere. Apparently, all sorts of problems could arise if the palace had the institute take over making all of their potions—they had long-standing deals with companies to honor.

As a result of all that, I had never made high-grade status cure potions besides

the ones we used at the institute.

“The herbs used for these recipes are the same as the ones used in my country as well,” Prince Ten’yuu said.

“Really?”

“Yes. At least as far as the ones written about in here are concerned.”

“Then you must have more kinds of potions in Zaidera than we do. I remember you mentioned herbs that we don’t use in the kingdom.”

“I’m not so sure. Is this a record of every single one of the recipes for high-grade status cure potions made in this kingdom?”

I had a feeling that I had finally reached my mark. Thank goodness. It had been a wild guess, so there had been a possibility that I was wrong.

My heart raced a little as I responded. “This was just a book I happened to find in the library. There might be books with other kinds of recipes as well. Is there a particular kind you’re looking for?”

Prince Ten’yuu’s gaze wavered slightly at my light probing. Was he unsure about whether it would be okay to answer? I was impatient to hear his response, but I endured. If I tried to rush him, I was afraid that he’d clam up.

After a pause, he smiled. “I’m not looking for anything in particular. I was just curious if there were any unusual recipes or not.”

From the sound of his voice, it seemed like he was talking normally. However, the expression that crossed his face, even though it did so for just a brief moment, told me a different story. I was probably the only one to notice that too, since I had been watching his expression closely.

“Oh, I see.” It was unfortunate that he wouldn’t tell me, but I tried to gain control of my disappointment by telling a joke. “There really are a lot of status cure potions, aren’t there? If only there were a single potion that could cure them all, no matter what it was.”

“Something that could cure them all?”

“Yes, like a panacea, for example,” I rambled on. “If such a thing existed, then you wouldn’t have to memorize so many recipes.”

Panacea: a kind of medicine that would cure any illness. It was a term I had run across in the video games I played back when I lived in Japan.

It sure would make things a lot easier if we only had to memorize one recipe, even if it was difficult to make.

Meanwhile, Prince Ten'yuu repeated the word quietly to himself before smiling. "It really would be nice if such a potion existed. I bet with something like that, you'd be able to cure as yet incurable illnesses too."

"Yeah, as well as illnesses that can't be identified at a glance."

"I'm sure you're right. Do you know much about such things?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure." I couldn't say anything either. I wasn't a doctor, but in the world I'd come from, it had been easy to obtain all sorts of information. There was a decent chance that I knew some things the doctors of this world didn't.

Despite that, I shied from the idea of saying I knew a lot about health and wound up giving a vague answer.

Prince Ten'yuu gave me a dubious look, so I said I only really knew about symptoms. That was true, since I didn't know how to actually *cure* illnesses.

"You know about symptoms?" he pressed. "Like what?"

"Hmm, well, you know, there are a lot of symptoms that don't necessarily tell you what the underlying condition is... Like, how about when someone still feels sleepy no matter how much they sleep?"

"Isn't it normal to feel sleepy? That can be an illness?"

"Yes, an illness where you feel sleepy throughout the day—and it's not due to not getting enough rest."

"I had no idea there was such an illness. Do you know of any others?"

"Let me think... If you lose a lot of weight at a rapid pace or if you stop being able to move like you're used to."

He hesitated for a moment. "You know of an illness that leads you to lose a lot of weight and prevents you from moving?"

“Yes. By not moving anymore, what I mean is that your muscles rapidly deteriorate or stiffen. The details of the symptoms differ depending on the illness.”

I couldn't remember very much. But I was pretty sure that there were lots of symptoms that appeared similar but were actually different.

Prince Ten'yuu's face grew deadly serious as he thought over what I said.

“Your Highness, it is about time for us to be on our way,” Prince Ten'yuu's attendant said during the pause in our conversation.

It sounded like the prince had another engagement.

“That time already?” he said. “My thanks for yet another interesting conversation. I hope you will be willing to chat with me again at a later time.”

I watched the prince leave the room and quietly sighed.

I had been unable to figure out what Prince Ten'yuu was after. However, there was no doubt that he was interested in high-grade status cure potions. And considering the look on his face, that had to be his ultimate goal.

However, I still needed to confirm it. I would probably have to take a wait-and-see approach for a while. I didn't like the idea that I would have to continue dealing with this anxiety-induced exhaustion, but I raised my arms up as if brushing the feeling away and yawned.

For now, I should finish reading that book I borrowed. I did enjoy looking at potion recipes, for some reason.

My eyes fell once more to the book on my desk.

Act 4:

Status Cure Potions

I STILL HADN'T FIGURED OUT what Prince Ten'yuu was after, but I had learned a lot about high-grade status cure potions.

After that day, I continued looking into them. I borrowed more books in addition to the first and read them one after another. I had always been interested in potions, so naturally I was really into these.

As I studied, I learned that potions and medicine were only superficially similar. Unlike medicine, potions were effective immediately after drinking them. That didn't just apply to HP and MP potions, but status cure potions too.

Also, potions didn't seem to have any dreadful side effects, which medicines often could. I couldn't help but notice that there was nothing written about side effects in the potion books. Herbs seemed to be able to cause them, though. So I could only assume that something about rendering herbs into potions removed the danger of negative impact.

I asked the other researchers to confirm this, and they had the same understanding, so it seemed likely to be true. They had no idea *why* there were no side effects though, and no one had ever looked into it before.

This lack of investigation probably had to do with the fact that researchers were often more interested in finding out how to make new things rather than why the things they could already make worked the way they did. Also, the resources available for our research were finite, so it was in a way unavoidable that no one had taken up the inquiry.

Also, while this was a given for status cure potions, there really were a lot of types of recipes. It was similar to Japanese medicine, in that the effects subtly changed depending on what ingredients you used, even among recipes for curing the same problem.

Because of that, the explanation for each potion was composed of extremely long sentences that were excruciating to decipher—so much so that I got a

headache reading them.

“Seeeeiii,” Jude called my name from behind as I stirred herbs in a small pot.

“Yeah?” I asked. His exasperated tone made me hesitate to turn around, so I responded without moving.

I heard him sigh and felt him move to stand right next to me. I timidly looked up at him. He was wearing an annoyed look on his face, one he didn’t bother hiding, just like I’d expected. *I knew it...*

“What are you making?” Jude asked.

“Potions for curing headaches.”

“Is it a recipe that came out of that book you were reading?”

“That’s right. It caught my interest when I was studying.”

No matter how absorbing the topic, it was easy to lose interest if the text was hard to read. Therefore, I had decided to try making one of the potions to do something else for a little while. There were a lot of types to choose from, so I’d selected the cure for a symptom with which I was quite familiar.

“I get that, but do you really need to be making so much? You’re not gonna use it in an experiment, right?”

“No, but I do need to practice, right? You know what they say: it’s best to prepare a shelter against every storm.”

“Huh? People say that? Where?”

“I dunno.”

“You don’t remember? Whatever. Anyway, it’s not like you need to have shelters prepared or whatever. You can use magic.”

“Maybe I don’t need to be prepared, but other people do, right?”

“Yeah, but usually no one uses high-grade potions because they’re so expensive.”

Jude was right. People didn’t normally use potions to cure diseases. Typically, they would just grind up herbs known to treat their symptoms, then boil and drink the results. Also, while high-grade potions could cure a number of

illnesses, they were much, much more expensive than the cost of the ingredients on their own. Even nobles didn't down potions so casually.

One of the reasons high-grade potions were expensive was because of the alchemist's fee. Since there was a dearth of alchemists capable of brewing them, the cost was naturally higher. Not to mention, yet again, many of the ingredients were themselves expensive.

"And these herbs you're using...don't cost that much, I see."

"Yup. The ingredients for this potion are easy to get."

True fact: some status cure potions were made from cheap ingredients. One of those kinds happened to be the potion for headaches that I was at that moment brewing in my pot. This potion was inexpensive because the ingredients were so easy to grow.

"Also, I got the ingredients from the clients, so the only resource I'm spending is my time."

"Clients?" Jude looked at me quizzically.

Our colleagues, I explained. They had given me the required herbs in exchange for a share of the finished product. This way, we weren't incurring any cost for the materials, and I would get some of the potions as recompense for my labor.

I figured the researchers thought this was a bargain on their end because they could just give me herbs they had grown themselves *and* wouldn't have to spend money on an expensive potion.

One of my colleagues had proposed this deal in the first place. She had noticed that I was interested in making high-grade status cure potions and recommended I make the kind for headaches. As it turned out, she frequently suffered from migraines, which was why she had broached the topic. Other researchers had overheard the conversation and said they wanted in too.

A lot of my coworkers suffered from migraines. In a way, it seemed like an occupational hazard. It also seemed like the sort of thing that would be cured if they lived more regulated lives, but some of them refused to adjust their lifestyles, or rather, they couldn't. These were the kind of people who forgot to

eat and sleep because they got so engrossed in their work, after all. It was these same people who wanted in on the potion for headaches.

“They’re asking for way too much for simply providing you with the ingredients. They should just boil and drink a standard medicinal concoction.”

“Yeah, but the symptoms go away immediately with potions, so they’d prefer that. Ah, okay, they’re finished.”

The potions were done, so Jude helped me with the bottling. It went much faster than I’d expected. When I went to hand out the potions to those who had given me ingredients, he said he’d help me out with that as well.

I decided to give him a bit of my portion of the potions in thanks. For some reason, he smiled and said he was happy to receive something I’d made.

All the researchers were delighted by the finished product. After I turned my back, I could’ve sworn I heard one say, “Now I’ll be able to pull an all-nighter.”

Hey, make sure you actually get the sleep you need!

I only doled out one or two per person, so I wanted them to regard these potions as something to keep on hand just in case of an emergency.

A little while after that, the people to whom I’d distributed the potions reported the results back to me. I hadn’t been expecting any reports so quickly, since I had made these potions to be used when people felt like it. However, we were researchers. Everyone at the institute was an expert on herbs, and furthermore, they weren’t afraid to experiment on themselves. They dutifully brought me their results as soon as possible.

The outcome was as I expected, which is to say, some people reported absolutely no effects. As it turned out, there were several different types of potions that could cure headaches. From these, I had picked one that targeted migraines, but it didn’t work for everyone.

I *had* worried that things might go wrong because I was an amateur, but no one’s condition worsened as a result of drinking the potion. There were no side effects either, which I had also expected, given what I read in the book. Fortunately, this applied to the individuals on whom the potion didn’t work as well.

Nevertheless, I suggested that anyone who saw no effect from the potion go get examined by a doctor. I offered to heal these poor untouched headache-sufferers with magic, but they decided this would make for a good experiment and politely declined.

I guess I can't say I'm too surprised by that outcome either...

"This is tough," I muttered to myself as I held a headache cure potion above my head.

"What is?" Jude asked.

I looked over my shoulder and smiled wryly at him. "It's hard to choose which kind of status cure potion to make."

"Oh, that again? Yeah, it can be." He smiled wryly back and nodded. He had likely heard about my results from the other researchers.

"Perhaps it'd be best to have them examined by a doctor before picking which kind to make," I said.

"That'd be a good idea, but I doubt they'd recommend using a potion for treatment."

"True," I said as I remembered Prince Ten'yuu.

I still have no idea what he's after. I assumed he was looking for some kind of high-grade potion that would cure a specific status abnormality. Or was he looking for someone who could *make* them?

Based on the results of this one potion, I had a feeling that there was more to it than finding a single potion for a given problem. As the prince knew so much about potions, I was sure he had realized that. Which meant that his goal wasn't just to acquire a specific potion, but to...

The more I thought it over, the more depressed I became, so I shook my head in an effort to rid myself of the feeling and put the headache cure potion into the storage box.

I spent the following days studying high-grade status cure potions—until the day we were informed that Prince Ten'yuu would once again be visiting. For a

time, he had been coming daily, so although the gap between this visit and his last had been brief, it felt like it had been forever.

Last time, I read a book to purposefully draw out his interest. I hoped that would lead me to his true intentions, but...what should I do this time? I thought when I heard the announcement.

But then some time passed and I completely forgot about it. In fact, I didn't remember that he was coming to visit until he spoke to me while I was out in the herb garden.

"Hello."

"Huh?!" I was watering the plants while lost in thought, so he took me completely by surprise.

I turned around, saw him, and quickly said hello back.

I-I totally forgot that he was coming. Did he only just get here? Or did he come from the institute? I wondered as the prince crouched down on the edge of the garden to more closely observe the plants.

"Are you the one growing these herbs?" he asked.

"Y-yes, that's right. All of us researchers have plots for experimenting with, and this corner is mine."

"So those neighboring plots belong to other researchers."

"That's right."

Prince Ten'yuu remained crouched as he looked around.

I started telling him about the herbs I was growing. The ones I had just watered weren't grown in Zaidera, so he asked me some questions about them. We started talking about more specific details, and he asked me to come closer to the herbs, so I sidled up beside him.

After we'd been like that for a little while, he suddenly changed the subject, his voice low. "By the way, do you know much about a disease that gradually weakens your body? One that would also leave you unable to move your limbs?"

“Huh?” I asked automatically, but he didn’t say anything back.

I frowned at the prince, but he merely pinched the leaf of an herb between his fingers to examine it.

I’m guessing he doesn’t want anyone else to hear? I doubted that his knight escort standing behind us could hear exactly what we were discussing. To them, it probably looked like he had asked me another question about the herbs.

If I had heard him correctly, he was asking me about a disease. If you were unable to move your body, that meant that your muscles had atrophied, right? I couldn’t claim to be an expert, but I had heard of such symptoms before. However, I knew that similar symptoms could arise from totally different diseases, so I couldn’t say for certain that I was thinking of exactly what he had in mind.

Not to mention, this was a completely different world. It was possible that the diseases here were entirely different from the ones found in my world of origin.

In any case, I lowered my voice as well and told Prince Ten’yuu only that I had indeed heard of such symptoms before.

“Is there a way to cure it?” he asked.

I thought for a moment, but again, I wasn’t an expert. I couldn’t come up with an answer. “I would have to do some research.”

It was possible that I just didn’t know about them, but I had a feeling that this world lacked a number of medications and treatments that had existed in my old world. However, this world did have plenty of things that my old world definitely hadn’t, such as magic and potions. That was the reason for my answer.

“I see...” Prince Ten’yuu’s expression darkened slightly.

“Do you not have any way to treat it in Zaidera?”

“We have a means by which to slow the progress of the symptoms, but only that. A certain medicine that one drinks, which is said to revitalize the body.”

I was at a loss for what to say next. I watched the prince drop his gaze while still touching the leaf. If he was going to all this trouble to make it seem like we

were talking about the plants, I suspected that we were dancing around the real reason for his visit to the kingdom.

If I wanted to keep my identity a secret, I needed to brush this all aside. However, I was a bit hesitant. I did enjoy talking with the prince, after all. We didn't just discuss herbs unique to Zaidera and their related potions, but what sounded to me like medicinal cooking and the ingredients that went into that. All in all, I had been incredibly interested in everything he had to say.

That wasn't the only reason for my hesitation though. Thanks to discussing my research with the prince, I had come up with some intriguing theories. And I had truly enjoyed the conversations that led to those ideas.

If I pushed Prince Ten'yuu away now, what would happen? Would I be able to continue our discussions, which I found so enlightening? Or would my refusal spell the end of this time I'd so enjoyed? This thought made me balk.

This was not a good relationship for me to nurture. I had been so cautious at first, but I had the feeling that just like the other researchers, I, too, had been caught in Prince Ten'yuu's trap unawares.

But I want to go down this path just a bit longer. I probably won't be permitted to look for a method of treatment, though. As I reached that conclusion, I felt like a terrible researcher.

So be it. It was possible that all sorts of people would be incredibly angry with me for doing this, but I had made up my mind. "Shall we try to find a way?" I asked.

"Huh?" Prince Ten'yuu looked at me with surprise.

I smiled at him. "I've never done any research on how to cure the symptoms you told me about. But this could be a good excuse, so shall we?"

He was flabbergasted. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Oh! But if you happen to have any technical books from Zaidera that could be related to the issue, would you mind lending them to me? Perhaps there's a cure among the herbs that grow there."

"All right," the prince agreed with a smile. "I brought several books with me,

so I'll bring them next time."

"Thank you!" I smiled back.

Although Prince Ten'yuu was all smiles, he still looked sad, and he shook his head ever so slightly.

"You want to develop a new kind of potion?"

"That's right."

After Prince Ten'yuu left, I immediately headed to Johan's office. I told him the symptoms that Prince Ten'yuu had described to me and that I'd like to develop a potion that could cure them.

Johan dropped his gaze as he thought this over for a moment before looking straight at me again. "I know you've been fervently studying status cure potions recently, but why do you want to make another?"

"Uh, um..."

I didn't want to tell anyone else the details of the conversation, since Prince Ten'yuu didn't seem to want anyone to know. However, in order to make potions at the institute, you had to report your work to Johan. My eyes darted all about the room; I felt stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Johan sighed loudly at my hesitation. "Let me guess: This has something to do with Prince Ten'yuu?"

Right on the money. I nodded. "Yes."

Johan smiled knowingly at me. "What's got you so troubled then? Did he tell you not to tell anyone?"

"Not exactly. But I got the feeling he didn't want it to get out, or something like that."

"Ah. Well, you have to tell me anyway, right? It's necessary for your safety."

"I know. I'm sorry."

Johan was right. As someone who worked in a research facility in the Kingdom of Salutania, I had a duty to make full reports to Johan. Not to mention, the

upper echelons in the palace wanted to know what Prince Ten'yuu was actually up to as well. This was to ensure my safety as the Saint.

Despite that, I felt unsure as to whether to tell the truth or not, when I took Prince Ten'yuu's feelings into account. I also felt guilty, since I had caused this predicament by prioritizing my own desire to talk to Prince Ten'yuu for the sake of my research.

Now that Johan had more or less pointed that out and I was forced to think back on my actions, I was depressed by the extent to which I had been an awful employee.

"So, what was it again? Your body gradually becomes unable to move anymore? I've never heard of a symptom like that." Johan changed the subject as I sank into thought, probably hoping to lighten the mood.

Still feeling a bit down, I answered, "Where I come from, there were a few diseases that caused that sort of thing."

"Interesting. And you had medicine that could cure it?"

"No, I'm pretty sure we didn't."

"So, you want to try to make something that didn't exist even back in your home world?"

"That's right. Things exist here that don't exist back there, so I thought... maybe it's possible that I could figure something out."

"I'm not saying it's impossible, but it sounds like finding the cure will be difficult."

"You think so too?"

Johan nodded with a grin. "Yes. But why not try anyway?"

I stared at him, astonished. After everything he'd said, I had assumed he would be against the idea. "Huh? Really? I can?"

"Why not? This happens all the time with research. Some of us even get more motivated when we have a harder problem."

"But—"

“I can see how Prince Ten’yuu’s been a good influence on everyone. It’d be nice to see if we can try to return the favor by helping him out a bit,” Johan said in a cheerful tone, ridding me of some of my guilt.

I hesitated before replying, “Thank you.” My smile was forced at first, but it soon widened into a genuine grin.

“Oh yeah, even if you do find a way to cure it, be discreet about the time and place when you make it. We can’t have him finding out your true abilities, after all.”

Basically, I wasn’t to actively experiment in front of Prince Ten’yuu. I was grateful just to have been given permission, so I had no quarrel with that.

“I understand.” I nodded, and Johan smiled with relief.

I worked basically every day for the two weeks after that conversation with Prince Ten’yuu in the herb garden.

First, I began researching diseases that made people unable to move their bodies anymore. This was where research on status cure potions always had to start. The potion wouldn’t work unless you accurately matched it to a specific condition.

After getting more details from Prince Ten’yuu, I moved forward with the essential yet straightforward part of the work: I read absolutely every single book related to the subject in the palace library, and I asked my colleagues all sorts of questions. I might have been able to do research more easily if only I’d had a computer and a search engine, but I didn’t, so I was stuck relying on the resources I had at my disposal.

Unfortunately, the results were disappointing. Not only could I not find any books that listed information about this illness, but no one had heard of anyone with this type of affliction either.

Perhaps even if someone did have that condition, people of this world had overlooked it because they had chalked it up to a weak constitution or old age? The lack of information made me think that this was a distinct possibility.

“Hmm, there’s nothing here.” I muttered in disappointment to myself as I closed the book I had just finished scanning.

“Doesn’t seem like you’re having any luck at all.” I heard a voice next to me and looked up to find Jude with a mug in hand. He had been watching me read, as he was on a break.

“The fact that I can’t find *anything* makes me wonder if such an illness even exists.”

“You said it’s a condition where you gradually lose the ability to move your body?”

“That’s right.”

“Maybe it’s described in a different way or something?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, your body feels sluggish until you stop being able to move.”

“Oh, maybe.”

“Do you have any other ideas?”

“I do, actually. I’ve been wondering if there’s no records of it because people don’t think it’s an illness, even though it actually is.”

“Ah, yeah. I can see that.” Jude knew how much I had been researching lately, so this was probably why he had tried to give some advice.

Someone offering you their thoughts and opinions could be a real boon. It was an excellent way to help you think through other points of view. It was entirely possible that Jude was exactly right—that the condition was just described using words other than the ones I had been looking for.

Does that mean I have to restart my research from the very beginning? I sighed. “You might be on to something. I guess I’ll have to read every book all over again.”

“You’re not going to give up?”

“Not yet. I’ve only just begun, after all. And I mean, it bothers me that I haven’t found anything.”

“Why’s that?” Jude gave me a quizzical look.

I explained that I had told Prince Ten’yuu that I was familiar with the symptoms he described. Now I would look like a liar if I came back to him saying I couldn’t find anything about the illness.

Also, it would be a problem if he asked me where I had heard about it. I could probably just say that I had forgotten, though. However, I hesitated to tell him such a lie, because I couldn’t forget the expression on his face when I originally said I’d heard of such an illness. He had looked like he had finally found a sliver of hope after being on the verge of giving up. I was incredibly reluctant to snuff the spark I had lit in him.

“But if I can’t find anything, I guess there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“Yeah. It’s not like you can lie and tell him you found something either.”

In the end, talking to Jude didn’t change anything. For the time being, I prayed I’d find something as I reached for the next book.

A few days went by, and I still hadn’t found anything despite keeping in mind Jude’s thought about different sorts of descriptions. Then we got word that Prince Ten’yuu would be visiting the institute.

For a moment, I felt like my time had finally come. I was unbelievably depressed, but I knew it would probably be for the best to just tell the prince the truth. I awaited his arrival feeling like a criminal who had received their sentence, paging through a book as the minutes slipped by.

“I apologize for skipping the usual pleasantries, but did you manage to find any information?” Prince Ten’yuu asked immediately after saying hello. He must have been awfully eager to hear what I had learned, and it killed me to give him the bad news.

“No. Unfortunately, I did not.”

Prince Ten’yuu frowned, just as I’d thought he would. “I see. I did some research as well and couldn’t find any new information either.”

“I am so, so sorry. And, um, I’m afraid I can’t remember where I first heard about those symptoms either.”

“It happens quite often. Don’t worry yourself with it.” The prince smiled slightly. However, the smile vanished soon after and his gaze dropped to his feet, a sorrowful expression on his face.

“Um...” I wanted to say something, my heart pinching with concern.

He instantly recovered that slight smile. “Oh, don’t mind me.”

During research, there are times when it takes an exceedingly long while for this essential part of the process to produce any results. In other words, it was entirely normal that I hadn’t yet found anything despite all the investigation I’d done. Despite this, Prince Ten’yuu looked quite disappointed. It was probably because of that hope that had just awoken within him. However, he also expressed an understanding that this sort of thing happened a lot. If he had predicted this outcome, then was there another reason why he looked so sad?

I wonder why he made that face. Is it okay if I ask him? I was a bit worried about doing so, but I ultimately couldn’t keep my anxiety bottled up inside. “Is something troubling you?” I asked cautiously.

He hesitated before answering. “No.”

“Um, if you don’t wish to tell me, then that’s fine, but you never know. It might help in our research.”

The prince hesitated again before slowly saying, “We might not have enough time.”

“Time?”

“Yes. We’re running out of time.”

What does he mean by that?

That question was answered by his next confession. My frown grew ever deeper as he continued.

Prince Ten’yuu’s mother was a concubine of the emperor, and she was suffering from an illness that caused the symptoms we were researching. At some point, the prince’s mother, who had once been able to walk normally, had begun to trip and stumble. Not long after that, she could no longer hold a writing brush. A doctor had examined her, but he had been unable to

determine the cause, since he had never heard of such symptoms. The condition had since progressed, and the prince's mother was now confined to her bed, unable to stand.

Notably, while the prince couldn't say exactly when the symptoms had started, she had already endured them for several years before she was first examined by a doctor. In other words, it wasn't an illness that progressed quickly, but when I considered the fact that she couldn't get out of bed anymore, I understood why Prince Ten'yuu feared that she didn't have much time left.

"So your mother is the one who's sick."

"Yes..."

As we spoke, I found myself remembering my own mom, whom I doubted I'd ever get a chance to meet again.

In Japan, I had taken a job so far from where my parents lived that I'd had to get my own place. I'd probably only seen them once a year. It was likely because I had been used to that that I hadn't missed them too often after I was summoned to Salutania.

But that was also probably because, in my memory, they were still alive. Imagining one of them being sick like Prince Ten'yuu's mother, not knowing whether they would live to see another day...it hurt my heart.

This complicated things. At first, I had been planning to make a potion that would cure a status abnormality, since potions could instantly cure effects, and you didn't have to bother worrying about how long treatment would take.

However, in this case, it was possible that wouldn't be enough. After all, the slightest difference in symptoms meant that a given status cure potion might not actually work. And in that case, we would have to find an entirely different kind of potion.

If only there were a potion that could cure any effect, no matter what it was...

I quietly made up my mind.

Act 5:

Panacea

I WAS DETERMINED to develop a certain type of potion. When I told Johan, his expression was beyond description. I had told him about it since I needed his permission to start brewing something other than what he had already authorized me to make.

Honestly, it was no surprise that he gave me that look.

On one hand, I yet again felt a bit guilty. It hadn't been that long since my last somewhat outrageous request. However, it was a researcher's nature to challenge themselves and aim for ever greater discoveries. On the other hand, I had a feeling that my ambition wasn't the only reason Johan was making that face. It was likely due to *what* I was thinking of making.

"If you actually managed to make such a thing, I wouldn't have the authority to grant you permission to give the recipe to Prince Ten'yuu."

"Oh..."

"We'd need at least the prime minister's permission too."

"Really?"

"Duh!"

That was more or less how that conversation went.

Basically, we'd need at least the prime minister's permission to share this thing. And by "at least," that meant that we would potentially need the king's blessing as well.

If it came to that, I'd have to reveal the prince's reason for wanting the potion. I was a bit reluctant, given Prince Ten'yuu's hesitance to explain the situation to others, but I got over it. It was just something that would have to happen.

There really was nothing I could do about it either. After all, I wanted to try to

make an as yet unheard of potion: a panacea. The idea had come to me when I remembered a conversation Prince Ten'yuu and I had a while ago. How nice it would be, we had thought, if a potion that could cure any ailment actually did exist.

The panacea was in all likelihood going to be far more difficult to create than a regular status cure potion. However, considering how few hints I had to go on in the first place, I got the feeling that it might not be that much more difficult than finding a specific cure. If helping the prince was going to be equally difficult to do either way, then I was better off making a panacea. That way I wouldn't have to worry about identifying exact symptoms and the exact potion to match.

That was a fairly irrational argument, and I admit that it was mostly a gamble. However, making status cure potions was its own kind of gamble, given that we wouldn't know if the potion I made actually worked for the prince's mother until she tried it.

After my conversation with Johan, I started gathering information on status cure potions for the panacea. I decided to continue pursuing that research because I had to report my progress to Prince Ten'yuu; I would have felt uneasy suddenly telling him that I was going to focus on making a panacea instead. I'd tell him about it when—if—I found any scraps of information that might help me figure out how to make it.

"Sei, you got a letter."

"Thanks."

A month had passed since I began researching the panacea. I had yet to find any notable information about the illness Prince Ten'yuu had described *or* a hypothetical panacea. I refused to give up though, and I was staring at an encyclopedia of herbs when Jude handed the letter to me.

I turned the envelope over to discover it was from Corinna. I held back my eagerness as I broke the seal and read over the contents of the letter.

The letter started with the usual sort of opening phrase related to the current

season and then launched into describing how things had been going recently in Klausner's Domain. Finally, she answered the question I had asked her.

"Who's it from?"

"The master alchemist I met in Klausner's Domain."

I must have been wearing a dour look on my face, because Jude asked me worriedly, "Ah. You get bad news or something?"

"Not like that..." Well, my hopes had been crushed, but other than that...

I had written to Corinna the second I began researching the panacea, asking if she knew any herbs that might help Prince Ten'yuu's mother—or if she knew anything about a cure-all. I had so instantly decided to rely on her for help because my prior investigation into status cure potions hadn't gone nearly as well as I had hoped.

The outcome was that I had lost. However, it wasn't a crushing defeat.

Corinna wrote that while she didn't know for sure, she did have some information for me about some herbs that might work.

"Wow. Alchemists from the holy land really do know their stuff." Jude nodded in admiration after hearing my explanation.

"Yeah, she really is an expert among experts. She's amazing."

I picked up the herb encyclopedia again and flipped through the pages. However, I didn't find a single mention of one of the herbs Corinna had named in the letter. Thinking that odd, I flipped through the book again. Still nothing.

"I can't find it."

"Huh? Is it not an herb then?" Jude went to fetch a different kind of encyclopedia, one that also listed flowers. *That* book had what we were looking for. He opened it to the right page and handed the tome to me. "It's this one."

We both peered at the page.

"It doesn't seem to be an herb though," I said.

"Maybe only the alchemists of Klausner's Domain realized it was actually an herb?"

“You could be right. I wish we could use Appraisal Magic to identify the effects of herbs too.”

“Ah, you know, I’ve heard that the kind of information you can detect from that spell actually depends on the level of the caster.”

“Oh...do you think Lord Drewes could Appraise it?”

“He probably could, but I doubt he’s the kind of person who’d want to help out with Appraising herbs.”

“True...”

The almighty Appraisal Magic had a surprising weakness: the amount of information yielded was entirely dependent on skill level. You needed a high level in order to Appraise people, while Appraising objects could be done at a lower level. Similarly, the accuracy of the information differed depending on the caster’s level. On top of that, not many people could use this type of magic to begin with.

If only someone among we passionate herb-researchers could use Appraisal Magic, I thought. It had been many decades since the institute last employed a person with such a skill. The effects recorded in the herb encyclopedia had all been identified with old-fashioned research. And I was convinced that there were tons of herbs out there just waiting to be discovered.

“Shall we try making a potion with this one and see what it does?” I asked.

“The alchemist who wrote that letter to you hasn’t tried using it before?”

“I don’t know. She didn’t say, if so.”

“Hmm. Well, we could, but that herb doesn’t grow around here. I doubt anyone’s been growing it either, since we’ve categorized it as an ordinary plant.”

“You’re right... And it’s a plant that grows in warmer regions too.”

I didn’t know if Corinna had made a potion with this herb before or not, but since she had written in her letter that it *might* work, I had the feeling she hadn’t actually worked with it before.

The best thing to do to figure out its effects will be to make potions with it

myself and ask a mage to Appraise them. Normally I'd just ask a regular mage, but this time I think I'll ask the grand magus himself. Nobody can match his skill with Appraisal Magic, after all, I thought.

I proposed the idea to Jude, but he tragically rejected it. Without the ingredients, we had no way to make those potions in the first place.

"Can we order the herb?" I asked.

"Yeah, let's do that—if it's available. Is there anything else we should order too?"

I put my ideas for experimenting aside for the moment and started looking up the other herbs that Corinna had mentioned. It would be better to order what we needed all at once.

Jude helped me out with some of the research, and we found that we did indeed need to order some of the other herbs as well. He said he'd place the order for me, so I wrote down all of their names and gave him the list.

Just like that first one I looked up, the rest of the herbs Corinna mentioned in her letter couldn't be found in the herb encyclopedia either. Was it possible that these herbs would lead to new discoveries? If these weren't trade secrets, then I wanted to add the information Corinna had given me to the herb encyclopedia. That would make it much easier to look them up again later. I knew that if I just wrote about them on separate sheets that I'd just end up forgetting about them entirely.

Be that as it may, I wasn't going to be able to start investigating these herbs right away. For the time being, I needed to prioritize status cure potions and the panacea.

Also, if I discovered any effects that weren't listed in the encyclopedia, I needed to ask for Corinna's permission to add them. I couldn't do something like steal the results of someone else's research.

For now, I'll keep researching until the ingredients arrive, I thought, and after Jude walked away, I returned to my studies.

I was meeting with Prince Ten'yuu when his attendant said, "Your Highness, it is about time for us to go."

They had another engagement that day, and it seemed we were out of time.

"All right. Let's stop for today then. Thank you, Sei."

"Thank you for your time today, Your Highness."

We said our goodbyes, and that was that for the day's meeting.

Prince Ten'yuu said I didn't need to see him out, so I didn't move from my spot. As I watched him go, I noticed Albert come into the institute just as the prince left. It felt like it had been a while since I had last seen him.

Does he always have that kind of look on his face? It seems much more rigid than usual.

"Hey, Sei."

"Hello, Lord Hawke."

"I couldn't help but notice that Prince Ten'yuu was here. Does he stop by often?"

"Yes. He has an interest in herbs, so he comes here to discuss them."

"I see."

"Oh, do you have some time to spare?" I asked. "We could have tea."

Albert's expression softened at the suggestion. "I'm all right for time, but what about your work?"

"Don't worry about that! I just got to a good stopping place and was thinking about taking a break."

"Wonderful. Let's have that tea, then."

I was relieved as I headed to the kitchen to ready the tea.

When I returned, I placed a cup in front of him and sat down in the seat next to his. We both took a sip, and just as we placed our cups back on their saucers, Albert said, "It's been a while since we last had tea like this."

"Yeah, it has. It feels like I haven't seen you in a while either."

“I had to leave the capital for a bit.”

“Did you have to go somewhere?”

“I went to visit my father in his domain.”

Ah, then I really hadn't been imagining that it had been a while since we last saw each other.

I had been working hard doing research for the potion to cure Prince Ten'yuu's mother and/or the panacea, and of late, I had frequently asked other people to deliver potions to the Knights of the Third Order. The few times I had gone to deliver them myself, Albert hadn't been there.

I see now. He was away at the time.

The Hawke domain was pretty far from the capital—right on the border of Salutania—so he had clearly been away for a relatively long time.

“Oh yeah, here.” Albert picked up a porcelain jar that he had placed next to his seat and put it in front of me.

I opened the lid curiously to find liquid gold inside. “Is this honey?” I asked.

“That's right. I brought it back as a souvenir.”

“I can have this?”

“Of course. I brought it back just for you.”

“Thank you!”

Sweet things like sugar and honey were precious in this world. I made sweets at the institute, so I saw sugar relatively often. However, honey had been hard to come by.

I was feeling quite elated now that I had seen honey again for the first time in a while, especially after getting to see Albert too.

Since he brought it, why not add some to my tea? Although it was a bit in the way of bad manners, I got up from my seat to go get a spoon for the honey. Of course, I didn't forget to excuse myself for a moment.

I tasted a bit of the honey before adding it to my tea and got a hint of some other familiar scent alongside its characteristic sweetness. “Huh? This smell...is

it apple?”

“That’s right. I’m surprised you could tell.”

According to Albert, the honey was collected from apple blossoms. He said it had been harvested the year prior, and when I thought about it, I got the feeling that apple honey had been rather rare even in Japan. It went without saying then that it was profoundly rare in this land.

“Isn’t this extremely valuable then? Are you sure I can have it?” I asked, suddenly worried, even though the jar wasn’t all that big.

“We aren’t able to harvest that much, but it’s not *that* valuable. Don’t worry. Besides, you like sweets, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do, but—”

“Then I want you to have it. No buts. It makes me happier to see you happy.”

After hearing that, I had no choice but to accept.

While I did like sweets, this sugary mood made me feel antsy and restless. I tried to stop myself from smiling out of pure bashful joy, but it was probably effort wasted on my part.

“Th-thank you.” I averted my eyes and thanked him again in a softer voice, which made him burst out laughing.

I added a spoonful of honey to my tea and drank it. It had a heavenly slight sweetness. I was so preoccupied by the scent of apple that I nearly forgot to tell him what I thought about the flavor. “It’s delicious.”

His smile deepened. “I’m glad to hear it.”

“Sorry, I should’ve said it sooner. I was just so surprised by the added fragrance of apples.”

“I don’t mind. I’m just glad that you like it.”

“Thank you for overlooking that. It’s been a while since I had honey with my tea, and it really goes so well with it.”

“Really? I’ve never tried it before, so I have no idea. I’ll have to give it a go next time.”

“Considering you don’t like sweets, you don’t have to, if you don’t want to. But if you do want to give it a try, you should probably do it when your throat hurts or something. I’ve also heard that honey in hot milk is good for when you’re having trouble sleeping.”

“It can help a sore throat and a restless sleeper? It sure has a lot of uses.”

“Yeah, they say that honey is good for all kinds of ailments.”

Then I stopped. I looked down at the jar of honey. *What did I just say? Honey’s good for all kinds of ailments?*

“Is something the matter?” Albert asked.

“Oh, no. Sorry, I was just hit with an idea.”

“About what?”

“I was wondering if I could use honey to make some kind of potion.”

The ingredients for making potions were herbs, water, and magic power. The effects of the completed potions differed depending on the type of herbs you used. Those were the basics of potion brewing, and it was believed that a given herb’s effects on the body were linked to the effects of the potions it was added to.

In that case, what if we used something that affected health that wasn’t an herb? Would we still make a potion? And if that thing was said to be good for all kinds of conditions, then...

“You sure love your research.” Albert stifled a laugh, snapping me out of my reverie.

It seemed I had accidentally sunk into thought while staring at the jar. I looked up to find him covering his mouth and turned away. I felt terrible—it probably seemed like I had been ignoring him. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize. I’m just glad I could be of some help to you.” Albert smiled at me, blindingly handsome as always.

Nngh, I feel so embarrassed... A slight warmth tickled my cheeks.

“I wonder what kind of effect a potion made of honey would have,” Albert

said.

“I was just thinking, if where I come from, it was said to be good for all kinds of health problems, maybe it’ll be good for illnesses in general?”

“Is that what you’re thinking? It’d be quite a feat if you managed to make something like that.”

“Yeah. I wonder if what the honey was made from might impact how the potion turns out too.”

“You mean like the type of honey?”

“The one you gave me today was harvested from apple blossoms, right? For all we know, honey from lotus flowers or other kinds of flora might make potions with other kinds of effects. I mean, that’s how it works when you make potions with herbs, after all.”

“You might very well be right, then. What kind of effects do you think apples have?”

“Let me think...”

Just what kind of effect *would* apples have anyway? There was the saying that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” but were they actually beneficial when someone was sick?

I started thinking about it again, but then I caught myself. “But wait, now we’re just talking about nothing but my work.”

Although Albert was the one who had asked the question, it was just rude to keep talking about something he found boring.

“That’s all right. So long as we’re both enjoying ourselves.”

“You’re enjoying yourself?”

“Yes.”

Albert’s such a nice guy, I thought as I gazed at this man who had never once shown the least bit of displeasure when I went on and on about my research.

I furrowed my brows after reading the document I had received from the

Royal Magi Assembly. I couldn't help it. I mean, I had been utterly defeated.

So far, things had been going well, and I had indeed managed to make a new kind of potion.

I had done exactly what I told Albert I would do—make potions out of honey. While following the usual steps for making potions, I was using honey instead of herbs. I had even acquired honey harvested from different kinds of flowers. My experiments yielded genuine potions, though rather than pink, they came out with an incredibly pale, transparent yellow color.

Having achieved that much, I promptly sent a request to Yuri to Appraise these potions for me. I had just received his results. However, they weren't good.

"Did you just get the results from the Appraisal?" Jude noticed me frowning at the paper in my hand and came over to talk to me.

"Yeah, I did."

"From your expression, I gather it's not what you were hoping for."

"Unfortunately."

Jude usually offered to help me with stuff, and he had helped out with the honey potions too.

He deserves to know what the results actually were, I thought as I passed the paper to him.

Jude looked it over and let out a defeated groan. "Well, at least they do have some kind of effect."

"Yeah, and it seems like there is a difference in effect based on what kind of honey is used. But as you can see..."

In a way, I was happy, seeing as the honey had worked like I thought it would. However, the problem was that the effects were incredibly weak. According to Yuri, these honey potions were weaker than regular potions.

Maybe they could be compared to one of those nutritional drinks they sold at convenience stores in Japan? But I had a feeling those were actually good for you, so maybe these honey potions were even less useful than those.

“I can’t believe it didn’t work,” I lamented.

Just then, I heard someone say from the door, “What’s going on?”

Jude and I looked in the direction of the voice to find Johan with his hand held up in greeting.

“We just got the results of the Appraisal I requested. Unfortunately, the potions aren’t as potent as I hoped.”

“Oh yeah? Let me take a look.” Johan took the paper from Jude, looked it over, and sighed. “So, you had the right instinct but not the right results.”

“Yeah. I was so sure I was on the right track too.”

“Hmm...oh!” Johan seemed to have an idea. He held up his index finger and then pointed it at me. I gave him an inquisitive look. He laughed merrily. “Why don’t you try combining it with other ingredients?”

“Huh? Wait, do you mean...?”

He was right. I hadn’t tried making potions with honey *and* other ingredients in the mix. Back in the world I came from, we had used several medicines at once when we were sick. So maybe there was some merit to the idea of giving this a try.

But what should I mix the honey with? I could use herbs as usual, but maybe I should try something else as well?

“Did we get any apples recently?” I asked.

Apples were the first thing that popped into my mind. Part of that was because of the honey Albert had given me, but the bigger reason was because apples were also said to be good for one’s health. Perhaps apples would go well with honey in a potion? They came from the same plant, so they seemed like they’d be able to synergize.

However, I had to ask that question because of the state of food technology in this world. Back home, they had developed the means by which to store food all year round, and we had access to apples pretty much whenever. However, in this world, foods were only available during their harvest season. In other words, would we be able to acquire apples at this time of year?

“Apples still aren’t in season,” Johan responded.

“They won’t be available until fall then?”

“That’s right.”

“Isn’t there a way we can get any? The colder regions don’t harvest them sooner or anything?”

“Even if they did, they’d probably rot by the time they reached us.”

“Can’t you freeze them?”

“I have a feeling that would affect how the potions came out.” Johan shook his head.

Too bad. It really was a shame.

So do I have no choice but to wait until fall? What if we sped up their growth with magic? Or would that affect how the potions came out too? Wait...speed up?

“Johan?”

“Yeah? Do you have another idea?”

“Can you get an apple tree sapling?”

“A sapling? It might be possible, but when are you supposed to plant those?”

“At the beginning of spring, I believe. But I think we can just ignore that.”

Just like there was a time of year for harvesting, there was a time of year when you were supposed to plant saplings. Normally, we needed to be concerned about that, but with what I was about to do, we could plant it whenever and it would be fine.

And if this didn’t work, then I’d just have to come up with another idea.

In short, I was planning to accelerate the tree’s growth in order to harvest the apples as soon as possible.

Johan was potentially right in that doing anything to the apples might affect the outcome of the potion. However, this time the nature of the influence might actually be a good thing. I was planning to use my Saintly powers to

accelerate the sapling's growth.

This idea came to me because I had actually done such a thing once before. Back in Klausner's Domain, I had revived a forest that had been destroyed by slimes. That was definitely what you'd call accelerating growth. It had to be possible to do the same to apples.

I explained my plan to Johan, and he pressed his palm to his forehead as if trying to fight back a headache. He seemed to be having flashbacks to my last adventure in miraculous tree cultivation.

"Well, now that you say it, it just might be possible."

"Yeah."

"Very well. I'll see if I can find an apple tree sapling."

"Thank you!" I smiled in response to his, ah, encouraging words.

Johan immediately set off to track down my tree.

A week later, the veil of darkness had fallen, and I was just thinking it was about time to head to my chambers for the night when Johan came to the institute. He beckoned me over, so I went to him and he led me outside. I kept up with his slightly quickened pace.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"We got the apple tree sapling. However, it's a little distance away."

Did he mean that we were headed to the palace orchards?

The palace grounds included not only the institute's herb garden, but vegetable fields and orchards as well. When I thought about how big the tree would get, that was probably for the best.

However, Johan surprised me by taking me to a lovely greenhouse. From the outside, it looked quite big. Cloth blocked the view through the glass walls, so I couldn't tell what was inside. It might have been better to call the place a darkroom than a greenhouse.

I followed Johan inside and found that it wasn't all that different from a

regular greenhouse. However, the temperature should have been far warmer inside than out, and it definitely wasn't. Why was that?

I tilted my head quizzically at my surroundings, at which Johan said, "You're about to use the Saint's magic, right?"

"Yes, that's what I was planning."

"Then we can't have just anyone see what you're about to do. His Majesty requested we make these arrangements."

"That makes sense."

"Also, it's hard to miss when you use your magic. It'd probably be better to do this in the daytime, but nobody's around at this hour, which is why we chose now."

"Thank you."

It did make sense. The fact that my magic could be used for anything other than killing monsters was a state secret. I assumed it would be fine, so long as no one was around, and making sure everyone was cleared out of a place was a piece of cake for the king. He had even carefully arranged for the tree itself to be hidden. The greenhouse was certainly large enough to accommodate this endeavor.

We headed to the back, where Johan pointed at a sapling. "This is the one."

There was plenty of space around it, and the greenhouse had a high ceiling. I figured I should be able to make it grow without any constraints.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath to steady myself. Then I touched my chest with my hands and thought of Albert.

I had grown quite used to summoning the Saint's magic as of late. A smile spread across my lips as I remembered his obvious pleasure when I told him that the honey he had brought me was delicious.

The magic flowed gently forth from within my chest. I quietly opened my eyes and gazed at the golden mist hanging in the air. Then I turned my attention to the sapling, and I wished for it to grow—grow and grow, to the point where its fruit could be harvested.

I accidentally thought about the panacea as well.

What am I going to do if the apples wind up having some weird effects? Well, if that happens—then whatever. I can just do some experimenting come fall with regular apples and compare at that point...

I unleashed the spell.

The air and ground around the sapling glowed brightly. Then the tiny tree began to grow rapidly. It reached a standard apple tree height, at which point blossoms unfurled from its branches. Then fruit grew.

Johan stood beside me, gazing at the scene with pure astonishment on his face. He was in such a state of shock that his mouth was slightly agape. Quite unusual for him.

I giggled as I watched his shock from the corner of my eye.

Once the fruit turned red, the spell was finished.

“*This* is what you did back in Klausner’s Domain?” Johan asked after the glow had completely faded.

“That’s right. But I did it on a much wider scale.”

“How do you feel? You passed out afterward then, didn’t you?”

“I feel fine. It was just the one tree this time, so I don’t think I used that much magic.”

Johan smiled in relief.

I approached the tree and picked an apple to inspect it.

Everything had been covered in golden sparkles right after I cast the spell, but they had faded, and now at a glance, the apple looked like any other. It had been just the same when I had used my Saint’s magic on those herbs all that time ago.

Johan inspected the apple as well. His cheek twitched as he gazed at it. He must have recognized something different in it. It was proof that what I did had worked.

Now all that was left was to use these apples to make potions as best I could.

Full of enthusiasm, I tried to get to experimenting the second we got back to the institute. However, Johan held me back—after all, I needed to get some sleep if I wanted to really put my nose to the grindstone tomorrow.

A month had passed since we harvested the apples. Even though his term studying abroad in the kingdom wasn't yet over, Prince Ten'yuu elected to return to Zaidera. As we heard it, he had received word that his mother's condition had worsened.

However, that was just the official story. The truth was that he had acquired the cure for his mother's illness and wanted to bring it to her as soon as possible.

The potions using the apples I grew in the greenhouse alongside the honey Albert had given me came out a deep amber color. I asked Yuri to Appraise them for me, and this time he didn't send the results. Instead, he requested I come see him in person to hear. He was afraid that the information he was about to give me might fall into the wrong hands, which made instantly clear that the results had been positive.

Johan and I arrived at Yuri's office to find that Lord Smarty-Glasses was going to be joining our meeting.

"It's a panacea," Yuri announced. I instinctively did a fist pump in elated victory.

Johan's reaction wasn't as intense as mine, but he smiled happily.

Yuri, for his part, was smiling much more nonchalantly than usual. On the other hand, the furrow in Lord Smarty-Glasses's brow looked deeper than normal.

That was all they had to say, so after basking in my victory for a moment, I headed straight back to the institute.

Johan had gone with me on the way there, but I went back on my own. Johan had to head to the prime minister to report the news. As soon as he got back to the institute, he summoned me to his office.

There, Johan told me that the king had ordered me not to produce any more panacea for the time being. It being what it was, they had decided to conceal its existence. They weren't convinced they would keep it secret, mind you; this was just for the time being.

I thought of Prince Ten'yuu when I heard this. I asked Johan, and he said that the king would be the one to decide whether to give the panacea to the prince. There was nothing more I could do about the situation. I had been warned as much when I asked for permission to start developing the panacea in the first place, so I did as directed without question.

Then, a little after that, I learned that Prince Ten'yuu had gone home.

It seemed to be a very sudden departure. He didn't even stop by the institute before he left; I learned of his leaving via a letter he had written to say goodbye.

In his letter, he thanked us for letting him visit the institute, and it was written in flowery language. I knew about the missive because Johan once again summoned me to his office to show it to me.

At that time, Johan also informed me of the real reason for Prince Ten'yuu's departure and what had happened with the panacea. Apparently, the king had hidden the identity of the alchemist who brewed it when he handed it to the prince. That was all Johan knew, though.

Nevertheless, Johan was pleased that the panacea had been given to Prince Ten'yuu.

Will it be enough to let Prince Ten'yuu's mom recover completely? Yuri's Appraisal said it would cure all status abnormalities, so surely it'll work, right? It'd be nice if he would let me know someday...

The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent

Short Story
COLLECTION

One More Step

I STOOD ABSENTMINDEDLY at a spot that was commonly used for meeting up with people.

It's always so busy here, I thought as I watched the person I was waiting for head toward me from out of the crowd.

Gah, he's so sparkly! I really did feel like I was hallucinating the sparkles wafting around Albert.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

I smiled back at him. "No worries. I just got here myself."

Albert was dressed much more casually than the attire I normally saw him in. Even though he was dressed simply, in a white hempen shirt and gray jeans, he still earned stares from the crowd. Maybe it was because his clothes were of such fine quality.

I suddenly felt awkward, but Albert encouraged me to walk forward, so that awkwardness quickly vanished. My heart still racing at getting to see him dressed so differently, we quickly made our way to our destination.

We started at a pancake house that had been all the rage recently, then went window shopping, caught a movie, and in the blink of an eye, it was evening. Like they say, time flies when you're having fun.

One thing led to another, and he wound up walking me to the door of my apartment.

"Thank you for walking me home." I felt a bit bad, since he had work the next day.

"Don't mention it. I would've worried about you making it home alone otherwise."

"Thank you so much for today, Lord Hawke. I had a wonderful time."

"Me too."

An awkward silence fell between us then. Albert's eyes darted around

nervously.

“Is something the matter?” I asked.

“Um, Sei?”

“Yeah?”

His eyes focused on me. I saw a spark of determination within them.

As I waited for what he was going to say next, he took me by surprise by placing his right hand on my cheek.

Huh?! What the?! I internally shrieked at the sudden change in his demeanor.

“How about you call me Al from now on?”

“Huh?”

We stared at one another, but I was unable to endure it.

“Al,” I said his nickname in a weak voice.

A beautiful smile spread across his face.

My eyes blinked sleepily open. My heart was pounding even though it had only been a dream.

Wh-wh-wh-wh-what the heck kind of dream was that?! Oh my goodness! Why?! I was again internally shrieking, barely managing to contain my actual voice.

It went without saying that the next thing I did was hold my head in my hands and start rolling back and forth in my bed.

One Rainy Day

AS I WAS ON MY WAY toward the palace from the institute, a cold droplet hit my cheek. I looked up at the sky and saw that the clouds that had been there since this morning looked much darker now, and so did the rest of the world around me, even though it was the middle of the day.

I still had about twenty minutes of walking before I made it to the palace.

Uh-oh.

I picked up my pace, but the heartless sky didn't wait. I dashed through the relentless downpour.

I gave up on heading straight to the palace and decided to make for the barracks of the Knights of the Third Order instead, it being closer. My hair and clothes were soaked by the time I reached the eaves of the entrance to the barracks.

"Phew!" I inhaled and exhaled deeply as I tried to catch my breath from all that running.

But now what am I going to do? Is the rain going to stop anytime soon? I'm stuck here until it does, I thought as I wrung out my hair.

Just then the door opened. "Sei?"

"Oh, hello."

It was Albert peeking out the door. His beautiful eyebrows were furrowed, which was unusual for him. "You're soaking wet. Come inside before you catch a cold."

"Thanks." I had been planning to be on my way as soon as the rain stopped, but I nodded reflexively.

He held the door open and left a space as he beckoned me inside.

As I headed in, I realized that I still hadn't made much effort to dry my clothes. I stopped and started wringing out my skirt, causing droplets to fall

onto the ground.

My clothes were a lot wetter than I had expected. If I went in all drenched like this, I was probably going to leave a big mess for them to clean up in the hall. I was glad I noticed before I actually made it all the way in.

“Sorry. Thanks for waiting.” I looked up again when I was done wringing my clothes out to find Albert covering his mouth with the palm of his hand, looking away from me. There appeared to be a faint glow to his cheeks.

Huh? I tilted my head. “Something the matter?”

“No,” Albert said stiltedly.

That was when I remembered that in Salutania, custom and etiquette declared it improper for a woman to show her legs to men outside of her family. And here I had acted like I was back in Japan, lifting my skirt up to wring it out and showing off my ankles, calves, knees—you name it.

Albert was too much of a gentleman to point it out, so I had just made him feel profoundly uncomfortable.

“Sorry,” I said weakly. I internally begged for forgiveness as I passed by him and went inside.

Albert guided me to his office. The servant who had been inside the room saw us come in and passed me on his way out.

As it turned out, Albert’s office had a fireplace with a fire already lit. It wasn’t the season where we’d typically need one, but the hearth was always at the ready to use.

“You must be chilled from the rain. Go and warm yourself by the fire.” Albert placed a stool by the fireplace for me.

He was right. It wasn’t a chilly season, but I was cold from being all wet, and in turn I was quite grateful for some warmth. “Thank you.”

I cheerfully went over to the fireplace, and then Albert raised his hand. I looked at it in confusion. He reached forward and brushed away a strand of wet hair that had been plastered to my cheek.

I looked at his face in confusion to find his eyes round with surprise. Had he

been caught off guard by his own action?

A strange mood settled between us then.

Uh... I opened my mouth to try to say something, but there was a knock at the door.

Albert snapped back to himself at the sound of someone announcing themselves and gave them permission to enter.

The servant I had seen just a moment before was back, holding a towel and a change of clothes.

I was relieved that the strange moment was gone, yet part of me wondered where things might have led, had we not been interrupted.

Yeah, right. Like anything would've actually happened. What am I thinking? I internally shook my head as I took the towel from the servant and started wiping down my wet hair.

Scrambling for a Taste of Autumn

I WAS WALKING DOWN the hallway heading toward the institute's kitchen when a cold wind softly glided across my cheek. It must have come from a window that had been left open. The temperature outdoors was still a bit warm, but the wind felt autumnal.

As if to welcome the coming season, the food being brought into the kitchen consisted exclusively of the sort that was available only during this time of year.

"There's so much," I said in admiration at the sight of the mountain of lustrously brown nuts.

"We had a good harvest this year," the chef standing next to me said cheerfully.

On the table was a basket that overflowed with chestnuts. They had been a gift from the company we usually bought our ingredients from. Because of the good harvest, the company had acquired a large quantity of chestnuts, so they had distributed some to us for free since we were a regular customer.

However, I doubted that was the whole story. The company was run by Jude's family, so I was sure that had something to do with it.

Since we had received so many chestnuts, I decided to make some preserved treats. I was going to candy some of the nuts, boil others, and make a sweet chestnut paste with the rest. It would have been impossible to do it all by myself, but the chefs were powerful allies. With our powers combined, there was nothing we couldn't do.

"Let's get started then," I said.

"Okay!" came the simultaneous response from all five chefs.

I began by taking a chestnut out of the basket, peeling it with a knife, and cutting it up.

My job was going to be the chestnut paste. The people assigned to making candied and boiled chestnuts were working on peeling the chestnuts that had been poured into a pot filled with water.

That's right—we had received more than that one basket. There was such a ridiculous amount of chestnuts that it made me want to laugh. It took an entire day of work to get through them all, even with the whole crew on board. Luckily, I had permission from Johan to spend the day in the kitchen. From that smile he had worn on his face when I asked, he was probably looking forward to our cooking plans. At least, that was my guess.

“How are things going in here?” Johan asked when he popped in.

“I'm just about done. I'm jarring them now.”

He walked over to where I was working and nabbed one of the candied chestnuts to pop into his mouth. “Mm. That's good.”

“No snitching, Johan!”

“It'll be longer before they're ready, right? Just one bite isn't that big of a deal,” he said as he reached for the boiled chestnuts next.

I knew this would happen.

His eyes had sparkled when I told him I was planning to make paste and candied chestnuts out of our haul. I had known from the start that he was going to come here to steal bites before they were ready.

I chuckled with resignation as I watched him eat just as Jude made his entrance.

“Hey, not fair if Johan's the only one who gets to have some!” Jude cried out upon seeing Johan chewing away.

“Well, well, if it isn't Jude.”

He had definitely come to snatch a few bites too.

“No snacks allowed for those who come snitching,” I announced.

“What?!”

I showed them the plate I had prepared in advance, and they both froze. Enshrined on the plate were sandwiches made with the chestnut paste mixed with crushed walnuts. I couldn't make complex desserts, but snacks like this were simple enough.

“Woo-hoo!” Jude reached out and grabbed both sandwiches off the plate.

“Hey, Jude, don’t take from my portion too!” Johan wailed.

“But you already had some, didn’t you?”

I laughed at the struggle unfolding before me, but it would’ve been hypocritical to scold them. After all, the chefs and I had been sampling our work before Johan arrived.

I mentally licked my lips as I finished up jarring the paste.

And after all that, I decided it was time to have some tea.

In the Rose Garden

IT WAS SUMMER, yet the season was still young enough that the breeze was cool and light. Albert asked me if I would like to go out somewhere. Luckily, I had nothing planned for my next day off. I gladly accepted.

The morning of that day, I was waiting by the door to the institute when I saw Albert heading toward me, riding a horse.

The fact that he's coming by horse must mean that wherever he's taking me is close by. Will we be going for a stroll through the palace grounds like usual?

Different possibilities drifted through my head as he finally reached me.

"Morning."

"Good morning. Will we be going by horse today?"

"Yup. Climb on."

I took his outstretched hand and got on the saddle in front of him. He immediately spurred the horse into a gallop.

Based on the direction we're going, I doubt we're heading into the city. Besides, if we were going there, he would've shown up in a carriage. That's how we've always done it before.

"Where are we heading?" I asked out of curiosity.

"The palace gardens," he answered simply.

"Ooh."

However, that wasn't really a straightforward answer. The palace gardens were as huge as you'd expect them to be at a palace. Hedges divided them into multiple sections, none of which were the same. I had been to the sections closest to the institute, but there were several I had yet to see. Since we were on horseback, I assumed we must be heading to one that was some distance away—one that I had never been to before.

I swayed back and forth on the horse for about twenty minutes before we arrived at our destination. Albert helped me off to the ground.

The hedges nearby were tall, and I couldn't tell what lay beyond them. I followed after Albert toward the break in the hedge, anticipation building within my chest.

"Wow!" I couldn't help but cry out in admiration when I finally caught sight of the garden beyond the hedges: it was awash in multicolored roses in full bloom.

"The roses that bloom this time of year are famous for their beauty. I heard that now was the best time to see them."

"They really are gorgeous. Thank you for bringing me here today." I smiled at him.

He smiled back. "The pleasure is all mine."

Albert escorted me into the garden, and we chatted along the way. The occasional breeze carried an extraordinary fragrance. The roses grown here weren't only pretty to look at, they smelled heavenly too.

I bet if I could extract some oil from these roses, I could use it as an ingredient for some good skincare products, I thought as Albert stopped us in front of a white rose.

"Something the matter?" I asked him.

"No." That was all he said. He hesitated, looking between me and the rose for a moment before taking out a small knife. He cut the stem of the rose he had been looking at and then inserted it into my hair, just above my ear.

"Huh?" I was so taken by surprise that I didn't know what to say.

Albert chuckled sheepishly. "It looks as nice in your hair as I imagined."

His words brought a warmth to my cheeks.

Augh. Saying something like that and looking all cute while he does it is against the rules!

I was left speechless, which made Albert smile all the more.

How to Use Roses

“SEI, YOU’VE GOT a delivery,” Johan told me while I was in the middle of work.

“I do?” I was surprised to get the notice from Johan, as normally Jude or another researcher would’ve told me a thing like that.

“Yup. A large number of roses from the palace.”

I clapped my hands reflexively at hearing this. These had to be the roses I had requested from Liz. Then again, if that was the case, why were they coming from the palace instead of her? I thought this odd, but I went ahead to accept them.

The roses had been brought to the same place where our herb deliveries usually wound up. As I approached, the heavy fragrance of roses hit me. She must have found the ones with the strongest scent, just like I had asked.

“The smell is so strong that it’s hard to breathe. Are you planning to make perfumes or something?” Johan asked with a grimace.

“Jam, actually.”

“Jam? With roses?” He gave me a look of surprise.

Did people not use roses to make jam in this world? Or maybe Johan just didn’t know, and somewhere out there someone *did* make rose petal jam.

“We’re going to be having a tea party at the palace soon, so I was thinking of serving it there.”

“At a tea party?”

“Oh, not a big one. This one’s just between my friends and I.”

“Ah, those ladies.” Johan knew who I meant then.

I was referring to Liz and Aira, who would be the only other guests. Liz had arranged for the party to be hosted at the palace. Because it would be at the palace, the maids would set up the tables for us and stuff, and that saved us a lot of trouble. On the flip side, it meant a fancier dress code than usual, which

gave me a bit of a headache. I remained less than a fan of the fancy gowns Salutanian ladies were expected to wear.

I couldn't help but stare off into the middle distance, filled with dread.

Johan guessed what was going through my mind and chuckled. "So, you're planning to bring rose jam to this party?"

"Yeah. It goes well as a spread on scones and pound cake. Or maybe I could make it into a mousse."

Johan started to get a glint in his eye as I listed desserts. He had quite a sweet tooth. I knew exactly what he was going to say next: "Are you going to make this rose jam today?"

"Yeah, after work."

"You're not working on anything pressing, right?"

"Johan...?" I said his name with a grin on my face.

Johan's expression was that of a man who'd been caught with his hand in the cookie jar; he averted his gaze.

I sighed. *What am I to do with this man? I guess I've got no choice but to make it.*

"If you give me permission, I could start working on it now. It takes some time to simmer the jam, so it would be appreciated if I could get started on it as soon as possible."

"Well, if it won't affect your work, then you can make it whenever you want."

"Thank you. Maybe I'll bake some scones as well while it's simmering. I'm guessing you'll want to taste them?"

"Of course!"

I knew it. He wanted to eat my cooking again.

Johan grinned broadly, which made me laugh knowingly. He chuckled in response, as if to admit it.

I wonder if I can borrow the kitchen right now? I'll have to ask the chefs. I made my way there, thinking about my next steps.

A Girls-Only Party During the Season of Roses

SOAP, SKINCARE PRODUCTS, PERFUME. Roses were used for a lot of things women used daily. Just dabbing on its sweet yet elegant scent could lift your spirits, so I definitely understood why it was so popular.

Fragrance wasn't the only amazing thing about roses—the oils you could extract from them were wonderfully beneficial too. Rose was called the queen of essential oils because it was especially effective at helping with troubles particular to women.

I wonder what would happen if we used rose oil in this world...

"This is incredible," Liz murmured. Her eyes were round.

Aira, who was sitting next to her, rubbed the back of her hand and sighed with admiration as well. Her skin looked glossy and moist, where up until a moment ago, it had been a bit chapped. Smearing a drop of the rose oil on it had fixed her up in the blink of an eye.

The three of us were having a tea party at the palace. The theme was roses, which were in season. As such, the table was decorated with roses, and the teacups and pot were painted with delicate depictions of that same flower. Roses, roses everywhere.

I had prepared sweets that used rose jam for the party, but I had also ended up refining some rose oil too. I had made it on a whim and had never expected it to be so effective.

"What would happen if we used this regularly?" Liz asked.

"I'm not sure because I haven't tried it myself, but maybe it'll make you look younger," I answered.

"That's not something the women of this world could possibly ignore."

I agreed. But only a limited number of people could use it. After all was said and done, rose oil was incredibly expensive. You needed dozens of roses to make a single drop of oil, so there was nothing to be done about the price. This was also the reason why I had prepared only a tiny bit of oil for the party.

"I had no idea it was so valuable," Liz said.

"That's right. It'd be nice if we could use it much more casually than that."

"It's just too bad."

Both Liz and Aira sighed after I explained how precious this kind of oil was.

Then Liz shifted her gaze to the sweets. "Say..."

"Yeah?"

"You used roses in these desserts you made for today, yes?"

"That's right."

"Do you think these might have similar benefits when you eat them?"

Liz's question made me freeze for a moment.

It was true that the food I had made in the past had all kinds of special effects, but nothing I made had ever affected a person's appearance.

"Cooking skills can add all kinds of effects, but I've never heard of anything impacting the way you look," I said.

"Too bad. And here I thought desserts might be easier to make than beauty products." Liz's shoulders drooped despondently.

Aira tried to cheer Liz up, clearly not liking to see her friend sad. "You never know, maybe they just haven't discovered any yet."

"You are quite right! It will be worth it to give them a try to see!"

"Wanna find out?" I asked while picking the jar of jam up off the table.

The two of them beamed at me.

Maybe we should submit this jar of jam to be Appraised then? If I smeared it on a scone, I have a feeling that Yuri would more than happily help us out.

Could there actually be some kind of effect in this jam? And if there was, what kind of effect would it be? We excitedly hypothesized while enjoying our teatime.

Winter in Another World 1

I ADDED GINGER, lemon, and tea leaves to a teapot filled with hot water. The leaves were a kind of herb, so I was in essence making an herbal tea.

I was wearing a pendant that was enchanted to stave off the cold, so I didn't feel the chill at all. However, as I walked down the hall, the fact that I could see my breath told me that the temperature was indeed dipping toward frigid.

I figured that hot drinks were best on cold days like this one, so I had come to the kitchen and prepared a drink with ginger in it.

I glanced outside and guessed the time based on how high in the sky the sun sat. *Yup, my internal clock's on the money. It's just about our usual time for tea.*

I placed a tea set on a cart along with a plate of cookies and made my way to Johan's office with the haul in tow. I knocked on the door and went inside. There, I found Johan seated at his desk, writing away.

"In the middle of something?" I asked.

"Yes, sorry. This'll take a little bit longer." He probably wasn't at a good stopping point yet. He glanced briefly at me before returning his attention to the document.

"Okay." I figured he'd come over when he was ready, so I started setting the tea on the table between the sofas, where I placed the plate of cookies, a jar of honey, and other condiments.

The tea probably steeped for long enough while I was bringing it in here. I poured it into a cup that sat on the cart. The liquid had a pale golden color. The scent of ginger and lemon wafted into the air.

Just as I was putting the teacup on the table, Johan stood from his desk.

"Care to join me? You were planning to take a break now too, right?" he asked.

I had indeed planned to do just that. "Yes. I'll gladly take you up on your

offer.”

I poured my own cup, which I had brought just in case, as he did sometimes invite me to join him like this.

I sat across from him on the other side of the table, and we both lifted our cups of tea.

After taking a sip, Johan’s face broke out in a smile. “Ooh, is this ginger?”

“Yeah, I used it because I thought it’d be good to warm up with.”

“Wonderful idea. It’s especially cold today.” He smiled happily and brought the cup to his lips again.

Enchanted objects were very expensive, so ordinary people didn’t own pendants that protected against the chill like I did. Johan was no exception to this, hence the fireplace in his office being lit.

Nevertheless, the chill had to be seeping through the window behind Johan’s desk, which he worked with his back to. He seemed to have been feeling the cold. I could tell because he was holding his cup in both hands to warm them, which he normally never did.

Hmm, maybe I should’ve brought mugs instead of teacups. I’ll do that from now on, on days like this, I thought as I enjoyed my time with Johan.

While he took his break, Johan mainly wanted to discuss herbs. You might wonder: Wouldn’t that be considered work? But, well, it was his hobby. Mine too, for that matter.

“I can’t believe how cold it is today,” I said.

“Me neither.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if it snowed.”

“I don’t know about that. We rarely get any snow around here.”

“Really?”

“Indeed.”

Now that I thought about it, I didn’t think I had seen any snow since I came to this world. Even back in my old world, I had lived in a region that didn’t get

much snow, so I guessed it was the same kind of climate.

It would have, in actuality, kind of sucked if it snowed all the time. Yet for some reason I longed to see it.

I turned my head to gaze out the window. As I did, I thought I saw something white flutter by. “Huh?”

“What is it?”

Instead of answering him, I put down my teacup and walked over to the window. “Johan. It’s snowing.”

“Really?”

I gazed out at the fluttering snowflakes. Johan came to look as well, his teacup still in hand.

“Huh, you’re right.”

“This is unusual, isn’t it?”

“Quite. I hope it doesn’t pile up,” Johan murmured as he looked up at the sky.

This was the same in both worlds too: dealing with a rare heavy snow in regions where it hardly ever showed up could get pretty gnarly.

But Johan seemed somewhat happy about it at the same time, which reminded me of the way a puppy might get excited about something. To be clear, I understood that feeling of elation.

Will the ground tomorrow be all blanketed in white? I wondered excitedly as I gazed up at the sky too.

Winter in Another World 2

AS I AWOKED the next morning, the parts of my body sticking out from under the blankets were freezing. I quickly buried myself in my blankets and grabbed my pendant, which I had placed by my pillow. It was a pendant enchanted with magic that protected its wearer against the cold. I put it on, and when I got out of bed, I didn't feel the chill at all.

Be that as it may, this morning's strangely frigid. That reminds me, it did snow yesterday. Could it be...?

Filled with hope, I drew back the curtains to find that the view outside my window was coated in a fine dusting of snow.

"There's snow!" I chuckled, amused by my own delight.

From what I had heard, it was rare for it to snow in this region. I had a feeling that a number of people would be direly distressed all day.

I wanted to stay cooped up in my room doing nothing for the snow day, but there was work to be done.

Guess I should get dressed, I thought to myself as I started changing my clothes.

Once I had put myself together, I headed down to the institute, but it was emptier than usual. It seemed to be because people who didn't live at the institute hadn't arrived yet—due to the snow. A researcher nearby mentioned that some people probably wouldn't even show up at all.

It seemed that for the most part, people thought that going outside in the snow was more trouble than it was worth. I supposed that since everyone who got exceptionally passionate about their research already lived at the institute, it wasn't such a big deal.

Probably.

Part of me felt like there *should* have been a problem, but people in this world were much more easygoing when it came to work.

In fact, I was told to take it easy for the day, so I decided to head to the dining hall for some breakfast.

When I was done eating, I headed back to the institute. Even though I had taken my time with breakfast for once, there were still the same number of people in the work room as there had been earlier. Perhaps the rest of my colleagues wouldn't arrive until the afternoon.

I could do all of my work on my own, but I couldn't stop thinking about how things looked outside.

Maybe I'll go and see.

And so, I made my way to the door that led to the gardens.

Outdoors, everything was covered in white snow, just like I had seen from my window. I saw tracks in the snow leading to the herb gardens.

I walked for a bit and squatted down by some snow that had yet to be touched by anyone. I touched it myself, and my fingertips grew chilled. I wasn't doing this for any real purpose or anything. I just felt like touching it.

It really is cold, I thought, stating the obvious in my mind.

Just then, I heard the sound of crunching snow to my side. I looked up to find Albert smiling my way. "Good morning," he said.

"Good morning. Do you have a meeting with Johan?" I asked. He was holding some documents.

"That's right. Is he not here yet?"

"Not yet."

Johan was one of the people who commuted to the institute, so I had no idea when he'd arrive, given the traveling conditions. I told Albert this and offered to take the documents for him, but Albert said he'd wait for a bit.

Is Johan actually going to show up in "a bit"? I wondered, but I was happy to get to spend some time with Albert, so I didn't say anything and just nodded.

"What are you doing?" he asked me.

"Nothing really. I just wanted to see the snow up close."

“Ah. Although, you seem awfully underdressed. If you’d like, you could wear my coat, or—”

“Oh, I’m okay! Don’t worry!”

“But—”

“I was thinking about going inside now anyway.”

“Are you sure? You don’t want to look at the snow some more?”

“N-nah. Oh, I have an idea. How about we have some tea inside?”

Albert tried to argue, so I changed the subject. I was sure he had to be cold himself—he had come here all the way from the barracks of the Knights of the Third Order! That was why I proposed tea.

“That sounds great. Thanks.” Albert nodded with a smile.

What kind of tea should I serve? Actually, we have some cocoa, so maybe I’ll prepare that instead. It’s a perfect warm drink.

For some reason, as the two of us headed inside the institute, excitement fluttered in my heart.

Feelings I Want to Hide

I WAS SEWING beside a window through which warm rays of sunlight streamed. It was yet another Lady's Day, and I was learning embroidery as part of my education to become a noble lady.

I hadn't sewn anything since home economics in elementary school, but it was kind of fun to pay careful attention to each stitch. Or maybe it was just the simple joy of making something with your own hands that had me feeling oddly elated.

"I can tell your needlework has improved." Liz peered over at my work. She was sitting next to me and doing her own sewing.

"Thanks. I know I still have a ways to go, though."

While I had indeed improved, my work was still no match for what natural-born ladies could accomplish. Liz's piece was a beautifully stitched, complicated pattern that I couldn't even begin to dream of working on.

"What kind of design are you stitching today?" she asked me.

"It's supposed to be globe amaranths." I looked down at my hands, which were doing their best to stitch circles of subtly different shades of pink. They totally didn't look like flowers. "Perhaps they'll look more like they're supposed to if I add some stems and leaves?"

"I am sure that they will." Liz nodded with a smile.

Phew. Up until now, I had made everything myself, but I had been thinking of asking someone else to do this one for me.

We were half a month away from Valentine's Day.

The Kingdom of Salutania didn't have an event like Valentine's Day or anything similar. However, ever since my summoning, around this time every year, I had given something to people who regularly helped me.

Last year, I had made brownies, which had been a big hit, so I was planning to

bake those again this year. However, I didn't want to give the same exact thing a second time around, so I was figuring out something else as well.

I had asked a bunch of people, and I'd learned that in terms of personal presents, people often gave out handkerchiefs and the like, ones that they had embroidered themselves. Thus, I was planning to give everyone handkerchiefs that I had personally stitched.

The one I was working on now was for Albert. I had picked globe amaranths because, in the language of flowers, they meant safety and security. I thought that fit him well, given that he was always going out to slay monsters.

However, not many people knew the intricacies of flower language. The more commonly known meaning for globe amaranths was quite different. I was going to be extremely embarrassed if he learned that meaning, so I hoped he didn't.

The meaning behind globe amaranths aside, I hope he likes this handkerchief, I thought as I continued my stitching.

Half a month later, Valentine's Day had finally arrived.

After I gave out brownies last year, my colleagues were hoping they'd get some again this year. The men all greeted me with lovely smiles that morning. I let them know that they'd get their brownies during lunch at the dining hall, and they beamed as they thanked me. (It was too difficult to hand them out personally to everyone, after all.)

Johan was the exception, though. He was always taking care of things for me, so I gave him his gifts one-on-one. I also reserved more brownies for him than for anyone else at the institute, and he got a handkerchief too. He had the same kind of grin on his face as he thanked me.

Now all that was left was the quest with the hardest difficulty level.

It wasn't that my target was too busy so I couldn't see him or anything like that. It was more of a mental hurdle.

I went to the barracks of the Knights of the Third Order and headed to Albert's office. There, I knocked on the door and went inside once I heard an

answer. Albert greeted me with his usual preternaturally dazzling smile.

“Good morning,” I greeted him.

“Morning. What’s going on today?” Albert gave me an inquisitive look. It was far too early in the day for me to have come to simply deliver a document.

It’s time. Here we go. My heart raced as I timidly held out what I had brought for him.

“What’s this?” he asked with a glint of anticipation in his eye as he took the basket I had packed the brownies and handkerchief into.

“Um... I gave you something last year too, so...” My mouth was dry, and I was having trouble speaking.

Despite that, Albert seemed to understand what I was trying to say. He happily lifted the cloth covering the basket.

“This was an event you participated in back in Japan, yes?” Albert asked as he picked up a brownie.

“That’s right.” I nodded. *I-I can go back to the institute now, right?*

I was awfully restless and full of feelings—I wanted to get out of there before Albert noticed the handkerchief.

However, that wish was made in vain. He noticed it right as I had the thought. I had folded it in such a way that the embroidery was immediately visible, and he appeared to notice that as well.

Albert put down the brownie and picked up the handkerchief. He carefully ran his finger over the embroidery, a sparkling smile spreading across his face. It left me defenseless. “Did you...?” he asked.

“Yes. Although, I’m embarrassed because it’s not very good,” I confessed with resignation, but oddly, that only made his smile grow even bigger.

He doesn’t know what it means in the language of flowers, right? I want to believe he doesn’t know!

“Thank you. I’ll think of you whenever I use it.”

I was glad he seemed so happy with his present.

“You’re welcome.” There was a faint glow to his cheeks as I nodded. I couldn’t stop myself from breaking out into a joyful smile as well.

Afterword

HELLO, this is Yuka Tachibana. Thank you so much for buying Volume Six of *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent*.

Thanks to everyone's support, I was somehow able to bring this volume to you all. I am so grateful to everyone for always supporting me. Thank you. I had a really rough time with this book. If it weren't for everyone cheering me on, I probably would have run out of steam halfway through. I don't know if it's entirely accurate to say that I managed to deliver this story to you all without trouble, but I feel deeply glad that I did.

To my editor, W, from Kadokawa Books: Thank you so, so much for making every effort to adjust the schedule for me! When I nearly lost heart midway through, it was thanks to W's ever cheerful support that I somehow managed to persist. Thank you. You helped me so much. And thank you to everyone else involved as well. This happens every time, and I keep telling myself that I need to pull it together, but you know how it can go... I apologize for all the trouble I caused.

Now let's talk about this volume. Did you enjoy it? There will be some spoilers from this point on, so if you have yet to finish the main story, please do so before reading any further.

So many things happened while I was writing Volume Six. I suppose the biggest thing would be the pandemic. And its spread still hasn't abated, has it? Readers, how is your health? I've mainly stayed cooped up in my home and made sure to wash my hands all the time, so luckily, I haven't caught it.

I wonder if any of you have switched from going into the office to working at home as a result of this pandemic? I bet there's some who were able to work at home and some who had to keep going in. This past year has been tough, since it hasn't just meant changes in work but all kinds of changes in daily life too.

As a result of this, I've needed to make some big shifts in my work style. Maybe it was because of the lockdown and staying in my house all the time, but I just couldn't find the inspiration to write. The words just wouldn't come, to the point that it kinda surprised me. I've somehow managed to recover, but I'm

afraid that once the pandemic is over, I won't be able to cope with working outside of my home anymore. And that scares me.

Speaking of the effects of the pandemic, I changed the symptoms that Prince Ten'yuu's mother was suffering from. Originally, I considered making it something infectious. It was around that time that COVID-19 started spreading worldwide and I first heard about it. So, I thought it wouldn't be good if her condition made people think of the pandemic and I altered it.

Admittedly, I didn't edit it *just* because of the pandemic. When I was thinking of how a cure could be offered to Prince Ten'yuu, I realized that an infectious disease wouldn't be good, as it would mean that for story purposes, Sei might have to travel to Zaidera.

Yasuyuki Syuri-sensei did the illustrations for this volume as well. Thank you for the lovely illustrations yet again. This volume's newly introduced character was Prince Ten'yuu, and she designed him similarly to Ceyran, in that his outfit gave off an exotic air! The patterns and plaited cords(?) are superb and made me feel a bit excited. Great work as always, Syuri-sensei. Thank you so much for all of your hard work. Even though Syuri-sensei made a design for him without glasses too, we weren't able to put it to good use. I'd like to get it into the story someday.

And it seems that the manga version is going well too. I'm so grateful to everyone who's given it their support and to everyone who worked on it, starting with Fujiazuki-sensei. Thank you so much for all of your hard work. In the latest chapter, they've just purified the black swamp in the western forest. The manga comes out so wonderfully that in the latest three chapters, I completely forgot I was supposed to be checking them because I was so captivated by this and that scene.

Perhaps it's because my memories got all muddled, but the only thing I remember about writing that part of the story was that I was having some major writer's block and then suddenly my deadline was around the corner. Not too dissimilar from how things have been for me lately. I also remember how my editor praised me for the foreshadowing I managed to do with the hair clip. I read over my original work while checking the manga, and I can see how they reorganized the story to make it much easier to read in the manga. That made

me really happy, and I'm quite grateful for it.

The manga is now on sale with great reviews, but you can read the latest chapter on the manga-publishing websites ComicWalker, pixiv Comic, and Nico Nico Seiga.* You can also read a portion of the manga for free too, so please do so if you're interested.

So, back when Volume Three was released, they made an audio drama for *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent* where you could hear Albert's voice. There were people who said they hoped to hear Jude and Johan's voices as well. Well, thank you so much for waiting for so long(?).

Have you heard the news? *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent* is going to be an anime!!

You must be shocked, right? I certainly was when I heard. So much so that I'm still at a loss for words. When I heard the news about the audio drama, I froze with a smile on my face, and I did the same thing this time as well.

As time goes on, it's starting to feel more real, but I feel so touched because the fact that this series is getting an anime is all thanks to everyone who's supported me and this series up until now. Also, there were people who said they wanted to see the series turned into an anime. I think it's thanks in part to people talking about a potential anime on social media that they decided to make it a reality. Thank you so, so much!

As of now, behind the scenes, work on the anime is going well. I've already received design documents for the buildings, rough drafts of each character's facial expressions, and the like. Rooms that I had only vaguely envisioned in my mind are now much more concrete. And they look lovely too. And the script! I read it to give it my okay, and there were so many things I hadn't thought of. I learned a lot from reading it. The anime will feature original scenes, so I hope you enjoy comparing it to my original work and the manga version.

Thank you so much for reading up until this point. Since the pandemic has yet to be contained, I hope you take care of yourself. I'm going to do my best to get Volume Seven to you as soon as I can while making sure to take care of my own health as well. I hope we'll meet again soon.

** Look for it in English, also from Seven Seas!*

SHORT STORY COLLECTION

First Appearances

One More Step – Special favor for Volume 3 at TSUTAYA *One Rainy Day* –
Special favor for Volume 3 at Toranoana *Scrambling for a Taste of Autumn* –
Special favor for Volume 3 at Animate *In the Rose Garden* – Special favor for
Volume 4 at Animate *How to Use Roses* – Special favor for Volume 4 at
Toranoana *A Girls-Only Party During the Season of Roses* – Special favor for
Volume 4 at Gamers *Winter in Another World 1* – Special favor for Volume 5 at
Gamers *Winter in Another World 2* – Special favor for Volume 5 at Toranoana
Feelings I Want to Hide – *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent* x *Madougushi*
Dariya wa Utsumukanai Dahliya Wilts No More Fair



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